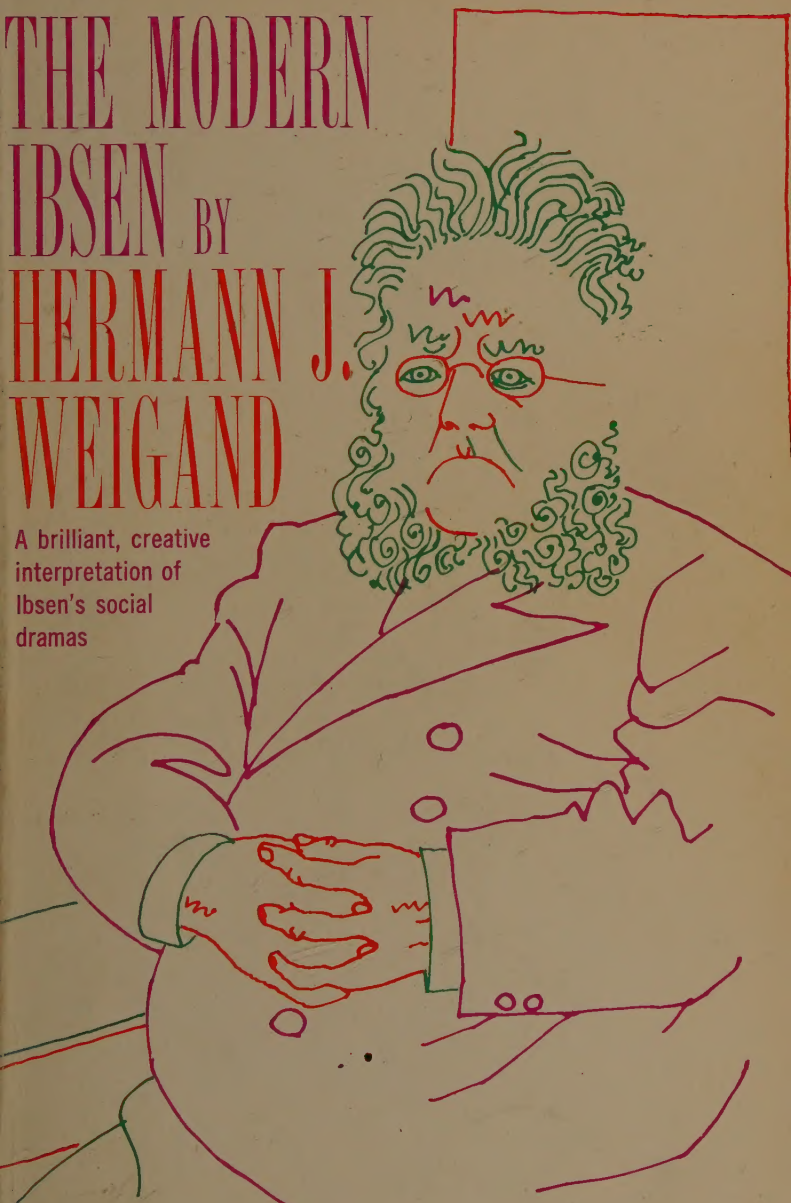
# THE MODERN IBSEN

BY

# HERMANN J. WEIGAND

A brilliant, creative interpretation of Ibsen's social dramas



D 54

A Dutton Everyman Paperback

$1.75

# THE MODERN IBSEN

# THE MODERN IBSEN

*A Reconsideration*

By

HERMANN J. WEIGAND

*A Dutton* *Paperback*

*Everyman*

NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON & CO., INC.

1960

*This paperback edition of*
"THE MODERN IBSEN"
*Published 1960 by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.*
*All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.*

*Copyright, 1925, by Henry Holt and Company, Inc. Copyright, 1953, by Hermann Weigand.*

*Published by special arrangement with Henry Holt and Company, Inc.*

*No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in a magazine or newspaper or broadcasts.*

# PREFACE

This book represents an attempt rather at creative interpretation than at scholarly research in the usual sense of the term. That may explain the absence of strict scholarly method, the omission of most of the biographical data found in other publications, the treatment of only what is roughly the second half of Ibsen's work, and the detailed and elementary nature of the discussion.

It is not an uncommon thing to pick up a book on Ibsen and find in it just enough discussion of the dramatic dialogue to serve as a pretext for digressions on the author's favorite themes. By way of contrast, the present studies take a close, sometimes a microscopical view of the text. Whether this painstaking analytical method is vindicated by corresponding results, or whether it merely makes the book tedious, must be left to the reader to determine, provided he has the patience to pursue these studies to the end.

Speaking from my own experience—a more fascinating or grateful task than the analytical recreation of the situations of these dramas and the characters that live in them can not be imagined. Throughout the work I had the feeling of being embarked on a voyage of adventure; again and again I experienced the thrill of discovering psychological relationships and subtle workings of subconscious impulses that at first I had not even faintly suspected. In my endeavor to charm the printed pages of Ibsen's dramas back to life, I felt many a time as though I were learning to read all over again.

Even now, after years of closest imaginative association with the people of Ibsen's dramas, I do not venture to think that I have probed to the bottom of all of Ibsen's secrets. If the reader, taking issue with me on some of my conclusions, will turn from these studies back to the dramas themselves, to review them afresh with his own inner eye:—so much the better.

Somewhat apologetically it must be said that the modern Ibsen, as I view him, does not begin with "Pillars of Society" but with "A Doll's House." As will be apparent from a comparison of the first chapter with the others, "Pillars of Society" does not permit of the type of approach invited by the rest, being qualitatively different from those that follow. Nevertheless its semblance of similarity to the others—easily mistaken by the untrained eye for an actual likeness; furthermore, its key position at the threshold of Ibsen's realistic period, and the specific ideas that link it with "A Doll's House" and "Ghosts," made its inclusion imperative. I trust also that occasional allusions to Ibsen's earlier dramas, and the assumption of the reader's familiarity with them may be forgiven. As is well known, Ibsen repeatedly stressed the fact that his life work is a single, indivisible whole, and should be studied as such. At the same time, the dramas of contemporary life are so different from his earlier work, both in subject and treatment, as to justify the present partial study.

It goes without saying that I owe an enormous debt to many of my predecessors in the field of Ibsen criticism. If I have omitted, for the most part, acknowledging my obligations in detail to critics like Brandes, Kerr, Woerner, Groddeck, Aronsohn, Aall, Archer, Gosse, and many others, it is

partly in order to avoid loading down the text with a large body of notes, and partly because I frequently found the greatest stimulation in writings from which my own ultimate conclusions differed most sharply.

Instead of appending a limited bibliography, I would call attention to the accessible bibliographical study of Ibsen criticism and biography compiled by Ina Ten Eyk Firkins. (The H. W. Wilson Company, New York, 1921.)

The text underlying quotations from Ibsen's plays and the preliminary drafts is based on Scribner's Copyright Edition, edited by William Archer, in 13 volumes; New York, 1911. I have not hesitated to alter a word or a phrase here and there, however, in the attempt to get closer to the sense of the Norwegian original. Page references are consistently given only in dealing with the drafts, collected in Volume XII, entitled "From Ibsen's Workshop." In the case of the plays, page references have been omitted except where the closeness of the argument made their inclusion a matter of necessity. Quotations from Ibsen's letters, which—I must add—have been accessible to me only in German and English translation, are based on the text of the American edition of Fox, Duffield, New York, 1905.

Acknowledgments are due to the editors of "The Journal of English and Germanic Philology" for kind permission to reprint substantially the chapter on "Little Eyolf," published in the issue of January, 1923, and to "The Guardian," which first published the chapter on "Hedda Gabler" in its issue of July, 1925.

THE AUTHOR.

# CONTENTS


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I | Pillars of Society | 3 |
| II | A Doll's House | 26 |
| III | Ghosts | 76 |
| IV | An Enemy of the People | 101 |
| V | The Wild Duck | 134 |
| VI | Rosmersholm | 167 |
| VII | The Lady from the Sea | 209 |
| VIII | Hedda Gabler | 242 |
| IX | The Master-builder | 274 |
| X | Little Eyolf | 310 |
| XI | John Gabriel Borkman | 356 |
| XII | When We Dead Awaken | 378 |
| | Index | 413 |

# THE MODERN IBSEN

# I

## PILLARS OF SOCIETY

When Ibsen began work, in the summer of 1875, on a play which was to appear two years later under the title "Pillars of Society," he was in his forty-eighth year. That spring he had commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of his emergence from the Grimstad apothecary's shop, by publishing a second revised edition of "Catiline." Eleven years had elapsed since he had left Norway and gone into voluntary exile, unbroken save for a single summer's visit. From Rome he had scourged his countrymen's lassitude in the fierce sermon of "Brand"; from Ischia and Sorrento he had held up the mirror to them in creating the figure of Peer Gynt, the indolent dreamer and facile compromiser; from Dresden he had baited them with the "League of Youth,"—a political satire, part comedy, part farce, which made his name anathema in the mouths of the young vociferous liberals headed by Björnson; in Dresden also, after his excursion to Suez and up the Nile, he had written "Emperor and Galilean," pouring into the mold of this "world-historic" drama his philosophy of the Third Empire,—the coming era that was to fuse into a new synthesis the values of Paganism and Christianity. Now, in 1875, he had taken up his residence in Munich, and here he wrote the first of his serious prose dramas of men and women in a modern social setting.

"Pillars of Society" is a trumpet blast calling society to account. The title is a bold advertisement of Ibsen's serious

satirical purpose. He operates it like a battering-ram that pounds and pounds away at the thick wall of cant and hypocrisy with which society has surrounded itself. Fully fifteen times the title phrase occurs in the course of the dialogue: it is part of the stock in trade of Bernick's, Aune's and Rörlund's vocabulary; Lona flings it back ironically; even young Olaf snatches it up; and in the last act it is blazoned forth on the illuminated inscription set up in Bernick's honor by a throng of his enthusiastic fellow-citizens.

Something of the irrepressible zeal of the crusader shows forth in the manner in which the phrase "Pillars of Society" is done to death: Ibsen still indulges his moralist's weakness for bold type and exclamation marks. And he comes perilously close to caricature in his grotesque sketch of Hilmar Tönnesen, the professional knocker, who justifies his existence by waving the banner of the idea. But for the rest, Ibsen took pains to curb the impetuous dash of his temperament. A realistic prose play afforded no room for the hot eloquence of "Brand," the fanciful extravagance of "Peer Gynt," or the prestidigitatious feats of "The League of Youth." With a degree of self-restraint, hitherto unknown to Ibsen in his dealing with contemporary life, he approaches the task of portraying a community which he felt to be typical of modern society in general and of Norwegian society in particular.

The scene is laid in a small Norwegian coast town. (Skien, Ibsen's birthplace, might have been the model.) The typical aspects of the community are vividly brought to our notice. The temper of the people is conservative in the extreme, whereas the trend of the time is revolutionary. The era of modern industrialism has begun to transform the life of the community. Machinery is rapidly supplanting craftsmanship; capital and labor, conscious of antagonistic

class interests, are organizing their forces. The shipping industry and the press have established contacts with the world of western civilization. The town itself has begun to take on a modern character: the municipal water and gas plants, the park and the school, are fruits of industrial progress. And now the projected railway is on the point of altering even more radically the life of the town.

But while the material horizon has been widening constantly, an opposing set of forces has been at work to tighten the controls regulating the moral conduct of the individual. An air of small-town smugness, prudery and puritanism, which nobody dares openly to challenge, has effectively superseded the spirit of gayety and pleasure that prevailed a generation earlier. Mrs. Bernick's charitable sewing circle reflects the spirit that is fostered by the socially elect with the support of the church. These women have very strong views on the frivolity, corruption and general depravity of the outside world. The garbled news reaching them from the wicked large cities of foreign parts serves to give them agreeable shudders, as they reflect complacently on their own moral superiority. The smallness of the community is one of the cardinal virtues by which they set store. In their sight large is practically synonymous with wicked. Bent as they are on stemming by every available means the encroaching tide of modern life, they present a picture of petrifaction in conservatism and respectability.

However, it requires but a little probing below the surface to show how much of this vaunted superior morality is only a thin veneer. It is nothing more than the product of herd cowardice. Those women who work so zealously for the uplift of the fallen love to whisper bits of spicy scandal. As for the men, they render lip-service to the same standards, but mental reservations are to them a matter of course.

They profess to be shocked by the unscrupulous practices of foreign business men, whereas their own dealings are not a whit more honest. Talk service and think profits, is their motto. The projected railway is a case in point. When the original project of laying a line along the coast threatens the material interests of the town, the leading business men mobilize sentiment against it by making a high moral issue of keeping out undesirable elements, and they have no difficulty in quashing the plan. But the moment the railway, now built to run inland, looms as a potential source of material prosperity, the keenest business brain of the town stakes his whole financial existence upon exploiting the situation, knowing that he can secure the eager backing of local capital by agreeing to a division of the spoils. As for the official spokesman of morality, who has been opposing the project with professional pathos, he accommodatingly falls in line with the altered views of his patrons on being tipped off as to which way the wind is blowing.

What, then, is the difference between this little northern community and the great cities that are supposed to be so wicked? In both the same unscrupulousness reigns, where profit is an issue, but to the lack of scruple the small town adds sanctimoniousness and hypocrisy.

Ibsen exposes the desire for power, influence and material gain as the mainsprings of conduct on the part of those men who are looked upon as the pillars of society. A large share of the blame for the hypocritical mantle of morality with which they cover up the real trend of their actions, falls upon the traditions of smug respectability that are characteristic of small communities. The fear of being blackballed by the guardians of morality makes moral cowards of even those superior individuals who have the vision of leaders and who are the initiators of progress.

Such being the make-up of those who are the pillars of society,—"then what does it matter whether such a society is supported or not?" asks Ibsen with Lona. Let society be wiped off the face of the earth, is Ibsen's implicit verdict, unless it can be radically made over to stand on a foundation of truth and freedom.

Society as at present constituted is built on a foundation of sham and lies,—that is the main thesis running through the play. But in intimate connection with the first, a second thesis is developed, namely that this is a society of bachelors, a man-made world, ruled by male egotism, assigning to women a position of subserviency and allowing no room for a woman to develop an independent personality of her own. This situation cries for a revolution. We have here that trend of Ibsen's thought which reached its climax in his next two dramas, "A Doll's House," and "Ghosts."

In the cast of "Pillars of Society" three women are assigned prominent parts: Lona, Martha and Dina. All three of them are rebels, in fact or in spirit, against the social system that would stifle their natures. Lona has had the courage to strike out on new paths in open defiance of society. There is something intentionally provocative about her mannish stride, her free and easy manners, her blunt vocabulary. Even a touch of the grotesque adds spice to her character. Martha, on the other hand, has suffered all her life from repression. Dina, finally, is a spirited young blood, eager to test her resources.

Ibsen has made it easy for us to define in precise terms what these women stand for in their revolt against society. What they want to set up in place of stifling artificial convention is free, untrammeled nature. They bolt from training, to follow the lead of natural instinct.

Dina gives the ideal of woman's emancipation its most

pointed formulation. She asks Johan whether over there in America, too, people are so very moral. He tries to reassure her that conditions are not so bad as painted, whereupon she says: "You don't understand. What I want is just that they should *not* be so very proper and moral. *Johan.* Indeed? What would you have them then? *Dina.* I would have them natural."

Instinct is vindicated each time it finds itself in conflict with convention. Lona had followed her natural instinct when she gave Bernick a ringing box on the ear. She had regretted it afterwards, but when she learns at last that Bernick had sacrificed her love for money, she is glad that she did not hold her natural impulse in check. "Now, by all that's holy," she says, "I am not sorry I forgot myself as I did that day." And does not Dina, encouraged by Martha's support, outrage convention and follow the lead of instinct in eloping with Johan? We must not forget that when Dina makes this decision, both herself and Martha still think of Johan as the lover of Dina's mother! The charges still stand uncontradicted; not a word has been dropped to clear him: Dina simply listens to the voice of her heart telling her to go with this man, and Martha eggs her on. Having suffered repression all her life, Martha can stand it no longer. "Oh, how we suffer here, under this tyranny of custom and convention!" she exclaims. "Rebel against it, Dina! Marry him. Show that it is possible to set this use-and-wont at defiance!"

This explosion on Martha's part is unmistakably Ibsen's own. Himself sick with repressions, he would like to shock the wits out of society. He is in the temper for an explosion that will make the dust fly. He would have a radical clean-up and toss worn-out conventions into the trash basket. The bigger the rumpus, the merrier. As yet, how-

ever, Ibsen has not quite the courage to give full rein to his iconoclastic mood. He has toned down the version of the original draft, according to which Dina follows Johan in a free-love union. And he knew well that the public, informed as it was as to Johan's innocence, would overlook Dina's and Martha's radicalism with the indulgence accorded to a comedy that is known beforehand to end well.

In both "A Doll's House" and "Ghosts" the basic situation is that of a woman rebelling against a man-made world of convention. In both plays the assertion of her natural instinct prompts her revolt. The ideas of these plays derive from "Pillars of Society" in a direct line of descent.[1]

One must come to "Pillars of Society" fresh from the study of "Brand," "Peer Gynt" and "The League of Youth," in order to realize how pointedly Ibsen's exposure of society is aimed at specifically Norwegian conditions. The smallness and the stuffy conservatism of the Norwegian community of our play are made to appear responsible for Bernick's crooked practices to an extent that is scarcely warranted by the facts.[2] According to the caustic satire of "Brand," the Norwegian, trying to make the best of his short-comings, has elevated smallness to the rank of a posi-

[1] The emancipation of woman is already touched upon in "The League of Youth" (1869), where Selma revolts in a manner suggestive of Dina. But Selma's outburst, in the last act, takes us wholly by surprise, since it stands in no organic relation to the rest of the play.

[2] Ibsen is pleading Bernick's case rather more generously than he deserves, in having him say to Lona:

"Lona, you cannot conceive how unspeakably alone I stand, here in this narrow, stunted society—how, year by year, I have had to put a tighter curb on my ambition for a full and satisfying life-work. What have I accomplished, for all the show it makes? Scrap-work—odds and ends. There is no room here for other and larger work. If I tried to go a step in advance of the views and ideas of the day, all my power were gone. Do you know what we are, we, who are reckoned the pillars of society? We are the tools of society, neither more nor less."

The fact that Ibsen wants us to accept Bernick's plea as sound, is conveyed by Lona's rejoinder: "Why do you see this only now?"

tive virtue. Ibsen castigates this type of smugness as something peculiar to his countrymen. If he has Lona and Johan hail from America and lets Dina see the new world in a haze of romantic glamor, he is far more intent on making out a case against the Norwegian community, the hypocrisy of which he is scoring, than a case for those larger communities with which it is contrasted; for far from having any illusions concerning the life of American communities, Ibsen, like most continental Europeans, thinks of America as the home of mob rule and unadulterated commercialism.

The bias of Ibsen against his countrymen shows forth clearly in Bernick's remark: "In this country the men of real business ability are almost all of foreign descent." In this single instance Ibsen went positively out of his way to deliver a slap at his countrymen. But another, apparently innocent remark is replete with bloody irony. When Bernick, in the first act, shows his three business friends out of his office, after the meeting, Rummel exclaims: "It is settled, Bernick! A Norseman's word stands firm as the Dovrefjeld, you know." That remark was penned under the influence of memories which stung Ibsen to a Berserker rage whenever he recalled them. In 1863, when the question of Slesvig-Holstein was about to be settled by a contest of arms, Ibsen, ardent Pan-Scandinavian as he was, had conjured Norway by all that was holy to keep the sacred pledge of friendship and come to the assistance of the Danish brother nation. But Norway maintained her neutrality, and Ibsen left his native land, his heart filled with a bitterness over Norway's treason which nothing thereafter could efface. Ibsen's relation to Norway remained an open sore to his dying day.—

Consul Bernick, whom we see transformed in the course of the play from a villain into a hero, is a problematic char-

acter. After we have come to know him through the first three acts as an unscrupulous schemer, he retrieves himself so brilliantly in the fourth that we must turn the searchlight of inquiry fully on his person to determine whether or not his regeneration is truly sound and likely to last.

It must be conceded that his face-about in the last act is carefully prepared for. Three whole days he has been harassed by the fear of exposure, involving social disgrace and complete ruin. He has had to fight desperately to keep his nerves under control. In sending out the *Indian Girl* in unseaworthy condition, to ride the storm, with Johan supposedly on board, he has committed an act tantamount to premeditated murder. And now his conscience, silent heretofore, but awakened by the enormity of the crime into which he has drifted, has begun to torment him. He has turned to Rörlund for spiritual consolation. His casuistical attempts to justify his crime by inventing impossible hypothetical analogies show the extent to which he is gnawed by the reproaches of his conscience.

And now he experiences a series of psychological shocks that break his resistance. (1) Lona tells him that Johan has departed with Dina never to return. So he has burdened his soul with murder to no purpose; and Dina's blood as well as Johan's is on his conscience! (2) But the next moment brings him infinite relief by Lona's announcement that they have sailed on the *Palm Tree*. Now he would countermand the orders for the *Indian Girl* to sail, but it is too late. (3) He receives a new jolt when Lona takes the incriminating letters and tears them up before his eyes. (4) The generosity of this act has just had time to sink into his consciousness when comes the terrible news of Olaf's escape as a stowaway on the *Indian Girl*. (5) And finally, after an awful period of suspense, during which the assem-

bling of the citizens' delegation before his house mocks his feelings, there comes the glad news that Olaf has been discovered and the doomed ship prevented by the delay from sailing. The rapid succession of these shocks, acting upon him with cumulative force, is too much for him. In a transport of gratitude over the providential miscarriage of his sinister designs, he finds the courage to confess openly and fearlessly the lie that has corrupted his past.

Not the fact of Bernick's confession is problematical, but the form it takes. That Bernick is psychologically ripe for confession cannot be doubted; at most the brilliant manner in which he acquits himself of his burden. But before probing into this question it is well to examine his confession in detail.

From the point of view of dramatic effect, Bernick's confession is staged under ideal auspices. In delivering his impromptu confession, he grows in the space of moments to the stature of a hero. Bernick displays a presence of mind, an alertness to exploit the situation in the best sense, which amounts to positive genius. He does not stand before his fellow-citizens with the hang-dog look of a crushed sinner. He knows perfectly well that those assembled are not a whit better than himself; each has some dark spot in his life to conceal; and he knows that he stands head and shoulders above the best of them as to vision, organizing ability, progressiveness and practical civic spirit. He sees no reason, therefore, for himself to retire in disgrace and waste his life in futile remorse. Now that he is cleaning his record by honest confession, he makes a courageous and intelligent fight to maintain the position for which he knows himself to be preëminently fitted. His words ring true and he deserves to win. It is particularly worth while to notice that he does not indulge in a show of self-exhibition. To the

public he confesses specifically only so much as concerns the reputation of the man he has wronged. He frankly admits that he has a great deal more weighing on his conscience, but with an admirably realistic grasp of the situation he says that this is something for him to settle with himself. His is not the fiber of Salvation-Army converts.

The nature of Bernick's confession, utterly misunderstood by many of Ibsen's early critics, strikes at the root of Ibsen's moral philosophy. The acid test of moral regeneration, as seen by Ibsen, is not the recital of a catalog of sins. What counts is an act of will, to put an end, once for all, to subterfuge and self-deception. Once that inner revolution is accomplished and the individual sees eye to eye with the truth, the path is cleared for forging ahead with a new spirit, and there is no room for dwelling dolefully upon the past and dissipating, in contemplative remorse, the energies that should be focused upon the tasks of the future. Ibsen makes it unmistakably clear that the sinner's exposure, by outward means, is of no value whatever. He does not want to see Bernick unmasked by force, because that would not have transformed his inner man: it would simply have been adding one more found-out crook to the ranks of a hypocritical society.[3]

Bernick's confession shows Ibsen in the unwonted light of the optimist, insofar as it shows him not merely demanding, as in "Brand," the radical regeneration of the individual, but actually believing in the possibility of its ac-

[3] This in sharpest contrast to Björnson's first thesis play, "A Bankruptcy" (1875), in which Tjaelde, a capitalist like Bernick, mends his ways after he has been forcibly unmasked by an honest lawyer. The theme and the alignment of the characters in "Pillars of Society" were undoubtedly suggested by Björnson's drama. It is altogether likely, in fact, that Ibsen was stimulated to the writing of his first prose drama of contemporary life by the desire to take issue with his great rival on a matter of fundamental principle.

complishment—sudden and complete. Ibsen coincides, in this respect, with the theoretical Christian doctrine of conversion. But whereas Christianity, consistent within its sphere, can rest content with treating conversion as a miracle wrought by the grace of God in a manner passing human understanding, the dramatist is expected to abide within the sphere of psychological law. He must not regale us with miracles. Whatever transformation of character he shows us must be convincing. Now is that the case with Bernick?

I have already pointed out its motivation as due to a rapid succession of violent psychological shocks. They account satisfactorily for the *act* of his confessing. But is the *manner* of his act psychologically in keeping with his character? I think not. We have here a case, I think, of Ibsen's ethical idealism vitiating his portrayal of human nature. He wants to show us a theoretically perfect case of moral regeneration accomplished, irrespective of whether or not it is humanly possible.

The succession of shocks which Bernick experiences is so violent that it makes him confess a lie of fifteen years' standing, a lie that is the mainstay of his existence. The exposure of this lie is practically certain to involve his complete ruin. He has said so himself on a number of occasions, and, prior to his confession, no impartial bystander would be likely to challenge the correctness of his forecast of society's reaction to the revelation. This fact gives us an index of the violence of the upheaval he must have experienced in coming to confess of his own free will. Now it is incompatible with the nature of the human mind that a shock of such unprecedented violence should leave his head cool and his brain clear for exploiting the situation to retrieve his lost position by maintaining his admirable pres-

ence of mind. In actual fact, a shock of such violence would have bowled him over temporarily, filled his mind for the time being with a seething wave of emotion, crowding out all conscious thinking. In real life, he would have broken down for the moment, heedless of anything save the impulsive urge to confess his wickedness. His mind would have had no room for drawing comparisons between himself and his fellow-citizens, showing him to be on a par with them morally and their superior intellectually. The dramatically brilliant solution which Ibsen achieves is made possible only by virtue of his ignoring, from a certain point, the decisive emotional factor; by virtue of his intellectualizing of the situation. Reduced to plainest terms, Ibsen, the truth-seeker, achieves a brilliant theatrical conclusion at the expense of psychological truth. From idealistic motives, to be sure, to give us an ideal example of moral regeneration. We have, then, the paradoxical situation of truth being sacrificed on behalf of the ideal. Ibsen had not yet arrived at the point of seeing clearly the contradiction in which this involved him. A few years hence, having learned the lesson, Ibsen pits truth and "ideals" against each other as antithetical terms; and ideals that are not certified with the visa of truth get short shrift from his hands.

But lest I appear to have been too hasty in denying psychological validity to Bernick's heroic act of redeeming himself, let us examine Bernick's past record a little more carefully. It was not a single rash act of youthful folly which was responsible for his whole development, as he would make it appear in pleading his case before Lona: his were the instincts of the smooth and accomplished opportunist, from the outset of his career. His friendship with Johan had been a ruse for the purpose of courting Betty. He had abandoned Lona, his love, because the in-

heritance had been settled upon her half-sister. When Dorf's discovery of his wife's infidelity precipitated the scandal, Bernick had got Johan to sacrifice himself for him under false pretenses by getting him to believe he had been to see Frau Dorf that night for the express purpose of breaking off the liaison. He allowed Frau Dorf to perish in misery. He raised not a finger on Dina's behalf; it was Martha who took her into their home. By smooth manipulations he robbed Martha of her inheritance. In the interests of his business he exploited Johan's absence by making him out a thief. All these were matters of ancient date. In how many crooked deals he has been involved since, we do not know. But we know that he is still opportunist enough to consign the crew of the *Indian Girl* to almost certain death when a variety of factors—press criticisms, Aune's stubbornness, over-seas connections—make the immediate departure of the ship desirable: he gives definite sailing orders, before the possibility of his ridding himself of Johan by this means ever looms. He consistently uses human beings merely as tools to promote his interests, summed up in the terms: power, influence and wealth. Both his wife and his sister he treats with insufferable condescension. His whole life is absorbed in his business enterprises, and he derives visible happiness and contentment from the prosperous course of his affairs. He knows no feeling of emptiness, no yearning to escape from make-believe, no pangs of conscience. He is the naïve hypocrite, who feels altogether at ease and takes an honest pride in his skilful piloting of the community to material expansion and prosperity.

I am mentioning all this to show that Bernick's individual crooked acts are but the outward manifestation of deeply ingrained habits of conduct—habits that constitute his very

self. Is it conceivable for any sudden shock, however violent, to extirpate habits of opportunism, of subterfuge and evasion that are the product of the practices of a life time? A sudden wave of powerful emotion may conceivably take him off his guard, surprise him into momentary surrender and leave him broken,—like a surgical operation cutting into his very vitals; but—granting the chance of gradual recovery, of the slow building-up of new habits—it cannot transform him in an instant from a smooth crook to a moral leader. Only by a leap from the realm of psychology to that of metaphysics can the transition from Bernick's early to his later self be effected.

The point of view here taken disposes of the question, likely to be raised, as to whether Bernick's regeneration will last, and what effect it will have upon the community. We may maintain, as I did, that under the circumstances Bernick's brilliant speech is a psychological impossibility; but once we are decided to follow Ibsen, for argument's sake, in the leap from psychology to metaphysics, the baggage of skepticism is a superfluous encumbrance. The Bernick who has the courage and the wits to deliver his ringing speech in the presence of the assembled multitude, can be blindly trusted hereafter to walk by the light of truth and freedom. He has been made over into a new man by miracle, his nature has been fundamentally altered, hence a new line of conduct will follow with automatic necessity. And surely this Bernick, who has proved his mettle, his clear-headedness, his presence of mind, his steadiness of nerve, his courageous vision in an excruciatingly trying situation,—surely he can be trusted to cope with the opposing forces in the community, to rally the better spirits around him and inaugurate an era of truthfulness. It all follows as a corollary of the one fiction which we have decided for argument's

sake to grant. If we believe that a single individual can be so radically made over as Bernick, there is no valid reason to doubt that the leaven of his example can transform the whole community. If we are to be idealistic optimists, we may as well be consistent about it.—

"Pillars of Society" stands closer to conventional dramatic traditions—those of the French stage particularly—than to the new form which Ibsen then stood on the eve of evolving. Neither the boldness of the ideas of which it is the vehicle, nor the absence of such violations of realistic technique as asides and lengthy monologues, should obscure the fact that in point of artistic method "Pillars of Society" is not the work of a pioneer, but of a clever craftsman. The characters, including the problematic hero, are simple types, carefully fashioned to fit their rôle in the dramatic ensemble, —even the most vivid of them suffering from a certain transparency of texture, a lack of body, beside the richness and depth of those full-size portraits of individuals which Ibsen was presently to create. The action is supported by an intricate mechanism, deftly devised for the scoring of strong theatrical effects, and excelling in artifice rather than in art: the upshot hinges, not upon the organic development of a situation, but upon the smooth functioning of the machinery.

It accentuates Ibsen's skill as a craftsman to observe that "Pillars of Society" turned out to be an eminently successful play in spite of the fact that the theme does not really call for dramatic treatment at all. The complicated plot is of the sort that would fit a novel of incident better than a drama. One could very well imagine "Pillars of Society" written up in narrative form without in the least sacrificing any of the suspense or the thrills in which it abounds; and conversely, one could think of "Pillars of Society" as a

dramatized novel, put into dialogue form for the stage, with all the original features of the narrative preserved intact. The detailed portrayal of the "milieu" of the town is suggestive of epic treatment; so is the plot with its wealth of incident and its two poles of interest, Bernick's intolerable predicament and the love story between Dina and Johan; so are likewise the scenes of tender sentiment following the departure of the lovers, when the spotlight is turned on Martha's and Lona's emotions, and the edifying family idyl of the conclusion. The unilinear movement of Ibsen's later dramas, the concentration upon a single goal, is lacking.

Ibsen has a very definite goal in mind, of course,—the regeneration of Bernick; but he approaches it by such a circuitous route that the interest in the plot fully balances the interest Bernick commands as the chief character. When the suspense is at its height, at the conclusion of Acts II and III, we are keyed up in expectation of what is going to happen next—to Bernick, to Dina, to Johan, to Rörlund, to the doomed ship—rather than in expectation of what Bernick is going to do.

Ibsen devotes an extreme in ingenuity to the service of a threefold task:—to manœuver Bernick into an intolerable situation; to bring him repeatedly within a hair's breadth of exposure; and to effect his eventual regeneration.

To bring about this threefold end with a maximum of theatrical effectiveness, Ibsen had recourse to a great deal of wire-pulling. He had to prepare an elaborate set of coincidences in order to steer the action, by their concerted functioning, to a predetermined conclusion.

The situation at the opening of the play is not naturally headed toward a moral crisis in Bernick's life. Bernick is wholly taken up with his financial undertakings, and his conscience is obligingly dormant. The crisis is deliberately

provoked by Lona's arrival with Johan from overseas for the express purpose of awakening his inner man to a sensing of the falseness of his position.

Bernick's position, painfully embarrassing from the moment of their arrival, the more so as his railway coup is just hanging in the balance, becomes insupportable in the course of the next three days. In part this is due to the natural momentum of the forces unchained by the new situation; in part, however, it is due to complications arbitrarily willed by the author in order to tighten the screws on Bernick's flesh. Without the injection of unforeseeable new factors, Bernick stood, perhaps, a sporting chance of being able to conceal from Johan the perfidy of which he had been guilty. But now, practically at Lona's orders, Johan has to fall in love with Dina who the day before had to engage herself secretly to Rörlund, in order to have the latter's jealousy supply the motive for the grand explosion—at the conclusion of the second act—which opens Johan's eyes to Bernick's treachery. This achieved, Bernick is granted a day's respite (in accordance with the most approved practices of the Holy Inquisition) to brace him for fresh tortures held in reserve. On the morrow Johan announces his intention —again sponsored by Lona in all likelihood—not only to marry Dina, but to settle down with her in his native town, and to that end he demands that Bernick clear his name publicly of the accumulated charges. This leaves Bernick no other alternatives except fight or surrender. He is cornered, without any doubt, but the method by which this end is achieved resembles in effect the wire-pulling of intrigue, even though coincidence abets Lona's scheming to a greater extent than she could have hoped for.

The same theatrical ingenuity is employed to prevent the public exposure of Bernick, each time that the situation

seems inevitably headed in that direction. We look for the crash at the end of Act II, when, in the presence of the assembled family, Rörlund denounces Johan to Dina as a rake and a thief and points to Bernick as authority for his statements. But to our amazement Johan preserves silence, even though his promise to do so is superseded by the revelation of Bernick's perfidy. If we had not known it up to this time, we must realize by now that Johan is not a man but only a cog in the dramatic mechanism. This becomes even more evident by the developments of the third act. Here Rörlund is requisitioned a second time to blast Johan's hopes, by announcing that he already holds Dina's promise. Still Johan maintains an inhuman silence, even toward Dina; and although he is now supposed to be aquiver with the desire for revenge, he sticks to his resolve to sail on the *Indian Girl* and defer the unmasking of the villain until his return.

Ibsen has done his best, to be sure, to make Johan fit the rôle assigned to him. Johan functions consistently, at any rate, as an honest, naïve nonentity. He had let himself be duped by Bernick's protestations of friendship, and he has been following Lona's leading-strings ever since the escapade that sent him to America. The motivation of his confessing the truth about that escapade to Lona is cleverly exploited to accentuate his naïveté. Although having shown no trace of a flirtatious disposition during his life with Lona abroad, he had thought it necessary in all seriousness to put her at ease with regard to his supposedly wild blood, so that she could gratify her longing to visit her home without any misgivings on his account.[4] As a matter of fact, Ibsen must

[4] The only touch that mars the picture is Lona's claim that she had already half lost him over there. "The boy longed to stand on his own feet."—There is not a trace of evidence in his behavior to support that assertion.

have felt that the balance of the composition required that Johan be kept as colorless as possible; a little more vividness on Johan's part would have swung the interest from Bernick as the dramatic principal to the love story of Johan and Dina. This was a danger to be avoided at all costs. All of which goes to illustrate that, instead of the action springing from the characters, the latter were invented to fit an intricate piece of machinery, pointing to the predominance of mechanical craftsmanship over creative intuition.

In our study of Bernick's character we have already seen how a concerted drive of incidents brings him to the point of confessing. The machinery is again conspicuously in evidence. Bernick's incriminating letters are produced at the psychological moment. Presumably Johan had brought them along at Lona's instigation, to be used in an emergency. They get into Lona's hands only by a last moment play of chance. The farewells between Johan and Lona had already been exchanged at the hotel, when by accident they meet once more. By another accident Dina and Martha appear at the same moment, and Johan learns that Dina is resolved to accompany him. In the wake of his transport of joy over seeing his dream of happiness come true, Johan abandons his plan of revenge and hands Lona the letters with authority to use them at her discretion. But in addition to these accidents, Providence and Nature seem engaged in a conspiracy to aid Lona in her fight for Bernick's regeneration. The storm is providentially timed to weigh down Bernick's conscience with acquiescence in deliberate murder, by sealing the doom of the rotten ship. Johan's last moment change of plan in transferring his passage to the *Palm Tree* is providential in its psychological effect on Bernick. The hand of Providence is again revealed in

Olaf's flight causing the ship to be delayed pending the search. And the blowing over of the storm, after the rapid alternation of terrors and joys has softened Bernick's refractory spirit, is a visible token of heaven's joy over the reclaiming of the sinner. In the light of the outcome, can one refrain from feeling *all* the complications of the plot to have been engineered by heaven in support of Lona's moral crusade? Surely this harrowing tale of suspense with its idyllic sequel is not realistic drama but pious comedy!

However we may feel like scoffing in the presence of such old-fashioned "realism," the virtuosity of technique with which Ibsen scores his theatrical effects elicits continued admiration. The interest is not suffered to lag for a moment, and from the end of the first act we experience one thrill of suspense after another, as new facts come to light and new complications develop in rapid succession. The second act, particularly, is a masterpiece in this respect, with its rapid succession of jolts that keep our interest on the run. As the first jolt comes the amazing discovery that not Johan but Bernick had been the guilty party in that youthful escapade; Bernick gets a jolt in learning that Lona is in the secret; Johan gets a jolt in discovering Bernick's callous indifference to the fate of Frau Dorf. He is jolted a second time in realizing that Bernick has not cleared him even in the eyes of his old chum Martha; now it is Lona's turn to be jolted by Bernick's frank avowal that he betrayed her for money; and finally there bursts upon the family, with knock-down impact, Rörlund's denunciation of Johan. The same high tension is sustained throughout the succeeding acts.

Ibsen's observance of the unity of place—a feature he took over from French drama—requires a word of comment. The scene of all four acts is a garden room which by its four doors serves as a link between the garden, the street, the

family apartments and the business office. To compress a multitude of scenes of such varied character into the compass of a single space required some such neutral meeting-ground. The artificiality of the procedure is, of course, apparent, and it leads to some awkward situations. The initial scene, showing Krap reprimanding Aune on one side of the room, while the feminine uplifters listen to Rörlund's reading on the other, is a case in point. Here a business affair of a delicate nature has to be transacted in the presence of the family and a group of visitors, for the spectator's benefit. Just a little later, however, we find Mrs. Bernick ignorant of the fact that a business meeting is going on in her husband's office in the adjoining room at that very moment, although Rummel, Sandstad and Vigeland must be presumed to have entered by way of the garden gate. The public character of the locality is exploited, moreover, to advance the action in accordance with the most artificial conventions of stage-craft. The most flagrant instance of this occurs in Act III, when Johan is made to back through the family door into the garden room, reiterating, as he does so, his farewell message to Dina, that he will return and clear up everything. The indiscreet publicity of this farewell gives Rörlund the cue to challenge Johan and then to round up the whole family for the purpose of announcing his engagement to Dina with due impressiveness.—

"Pillars of Society" is of the prosy quality of an avowed thesis play; but it is far from being dull on that account. For that it is written with too much gusto, and its optimism has something contagious. If the finesse of Ibsen's later art is still lacking; if the spontaneity of the dialogue is crudely violated by Ibsen's battering-ram tactics; if the characters owe their origin rather to a process of mechanical assembling than to organic growth; if there is here scarcely a

trace of that irreproachable objectivity to be found a few years hence in Ibsen's master dramas; if artifice is more evident than art in the composition: "Pillars of Society" has nevertheless stampeded countless intelligent audiences to wild applause, and even to-day it can count, whenever well staged, upon an enthusiastic reception.

## II

## A DOLL'S HOUSE

When Nora leaves Torvald, who sits with his face buried in his hands; when the dull thud of the great door below is heard, we are profoundly shaken by the domestic tragedy we have seen enacted. We feel too crushed to applaud. Having had the misfortune to be born of the male sex, we slink away in shame, vowing to mend our ways. Just about to leave the house, we are startled by the sound of a clear male voice, irreverently breaking the silence. The very sound is shocking, but the words we hear uttered make us turn in dumb amazement. "The meaning of the final scene," the voice says, "is epitomized by Nora's remark: 'Yes, Torvald. Now I have changed my dress.' "

Having recovered sufficiently from our blank stupor, we stagger homeward. We reach for the little volume on the shelf. We are once more in the midst of the first scene. We read on. We pause. We turn back. We thumb the pages frantically in the hunt for half-remembered passages. A little calmer, we start once more at the beginning. We repeat the performance for the twentieth time. We pore over the text as if it were a slide under the microscope. Now and then a snort or a half-stifled ejaculation breaks the stillness, as we discover some significant touch that had been overlooked in the early heat of our passionate search. Finally, when the gray dawn steals through the windows, we close the book. noting with satisfaction as we yield to the

lure of the couch, that our masculine self-respect has in a measure returned.

Nora, the merry lark, the frisky squirrel, who disports herself so gayly in the Helmers' cozy apartments, has a bagful of tricks. Whatever the identity of her father, we have to watch her for only two minutes to know her as a daughter of Eve, adept in an infinity of little arts that make her irresistibly winsome to the masculine eye. Tripping in as she does, laden with a mountain of Christmas parcels, her face alive with mirth, humming a snatch of a tune, she scatters a flood of sunshine. Her generous feeing of the porter, her stealthy nibbling at the macaroons, her playful talk with Torvald through the closed office-door, show her bubbling over with good spirits.

When Torvald appears after a minute or two, we take in their relationship at a glance. They have been married for eight years, but he is as captivated by his little wife as during the days of his courtship, and she adores him. They seem ideally mated, each supplementing the other's deficiency,—Torvald supplying the common sense and Nora the freedom of fancy to the match. They are adjusted to each other without any friction. Certainly there appears not a trace of repression in Nora's conduct.

We cannot take a step in the analysis of this drama without looking both forward and backward. In studying Nora's actions we must never let the fact slip our minds that she has her secret to conceal from her husband. Take her charming exhibition of extravagance in the first scene. We see her give a generous tip to the porter. We see her gratifying her sweet tooth. We hear her begging Torvald so prettily to let her do a little squandering this Christmas. Torvald loves to call her his little spendthrift. Her protestation that she saves as much as she can, draws his laugh

ing retort: "Very true—as much as you can—but that's precisely nothing." Torvald tells her that in money matters she has inherited her father's disposition. And in the next scene Christina Linde reminds her of what a shocking little spendthrift she used to be in their school days.

Now take the other side of the ledger. For seven years Nora has been paying interest and amortization on her loan. She earned a little money occasionally by doing light fancywork. A year ago, she shut herself up every night for three weeks before Christmas, doing copywork, pretending all the while to be working on decorations for the Christmas tree, and eventually blaming the meagerness of her results on the cat. But the bulk of the money came from another source: "I couldn't save much out of the housekeeping, for, of course, Torvald had to live well. And I couldn't let the children go about badly dressed; all I got for them I spent on them, the blessed darlings. . . . When Torvald gave me money for clothes, and so on, I never spent more than half of it; I always bought the simplest and cheapest things. It's lucky that everything suits me so well—Torvald never had any suspicions. But it was often very hard, Christina dear. For it's nice to be beautifully dressed—now, isn't it?"

Nora has no idea how much she has paid off. Incidentally, we find out a little later, when Krogstad interrupts her game with the children, that although it's now Christmas eve she hasn't saved up the amount due on the first of the year.

Before we draw our conclusions, we must take a glance back at the first scene. There we saw her spending gayly and getting ready to squander more. But remember, it's Christmas; and who doesn't get the spending fever then? Moreover, didn't Torvald's glorious good fortune warrant a little exceptional extravagance? We should be cautioned,

however, by her nibbling at the forbidden macaroons against taking her self-denial any too seriously. On the other hand, the coquettish tricks she employs to get money out of Torvald appear in a new light, as we realize how she plans to use this money.

All in all, it is a complex state of mind, of which Nora's behavior gives us glimpses. In a preliminary way we may attempt the following summary: (1) A certain degree of heroism must be conceded to the little woman who sacrifices her vanity year after year to live up to that irksome obligation. The fact that she skimps herself rather than her husband and children shows a fine spirit. (2) At the same time she is self-conscious enough to underscore that aspect of the case to Christina. (3) She is tremendously proud of having kept her secret; as a matter of fact, however, her knowledge of Torvald's strict notions left no other course open to her. (4) In providing for the quarterly payments, she is incapable of any systematic saving. She lives from hand to mouth, and she is of so flighty a temperament that we cannot think of her as being haunted by her obligation (5) She has been getting a great deal of childish fun out of working a bit now and then in secret. It made her feel so important, so much like a man. (6) The play-acting to which she resorted to get money out of Torvald gave her the most perfect opportunity for self-expression. In opening up her bagful of tricks, she was altogether herself. For one so naturally extravagant as Nora it required no effort to appear even a little more extravagant than she was.

Now let us review the circumstances of Nora's forgery. They had been married a year when Torvald's health broke down in consequence of overwork—the result of his attempting to provide adequately for his young wife. At that time Nora was daily expecting the birth of her first child,

and to add to her troubles, her beloved father was dying, and she could not travel home to see him. The physicians came to Nora and told her that Torvald's life was in danger, since he was in no condition to bear the shock of such a revelation himself. They suggested a period of complete rest and a trip to the south, whereupon Nora, trading on her character of the irresponsible spoiled child, began to display a keen longing on her own part to spend a year in Italy. But the coquetry, the tears and the supplications she enlisted in the interest of so good a cause failed to budge her scrupulous husband from his aversion to borrowing, however it must have wrung his heart to refuse his little lark anything she had set her heart on.[1] But determined as she was to get the money, Nora managed to get a loan of twelve hundred dollars from Krogstad, a money-lender, on condition that her father endorse the note. She returned the note with the forged endorsement after having kept it five or six days; and within a month, after she had been successfully delivered of a boy child, they started south.

We must look at the facts more closely, however, to understand how Krogstad discovered the forgery and why Nora admitted it frankly when questioned.

Nora had the note for five or six days, as Krogstad remarks. The forged signature was dated October 2nd. Accordingly, if Nora used her wits at all, she must have received the note two or three days prior to, and returned it two or three days after that date, keeping it just as long as

[1] We have only Nora's own recital to go on,—a fact which may give pause to the more skeptically minded reader when he discovers later how addicted she is to romancing. Has she possibly retouched the facts, exaggerating Torvald's illness? Did her own longing to spend a year in the south contribute by any chance to her conviction that nothing but that trip could save Torvald's life? However, since Ibsen did not choose to develop that side of the case, it does not seem advisable to press the point.

a letter would normally require to be sent and returned from her father's home. So we may assume that Nora had the note from the 29th or 30th of September to the 4th or 5th of October. As it happens, however, her father died on the 29th of September. Now, whether the news reached Nora that same day by telegraph or possibly not until two days later by mail, it did not affect her plans in any case, because she had never intended to ask him for his signature. By that time, however, Nora knew that it could have done no good to send him the note, since he was dead, in all probability, before she could have posted it and certainly before it could have reached him. Every one will agree, I think, that one does not forget a fact of such an order. Nora knew, in other words, that if the question as to the genuineness of the signature were ever raised, she was caught. This explains why she admits the truth, when Krogstad puts the question to her point blank. Nora is too clever to lie when nothing is to be gained by subterfuge.

It is not possible to say as definitely how Krogstad's suspicions came to be aroused. In any case, that is inconsequential. It may have been the date in Nora's handwriting; but it is just as likely that a newspaper report of her father's death, soon after, put him on the track of the truth. And it required no particular shrewdness on his part to understand that Nora's father could not have signed the note, when the dates spoke so plainly. If Krogstad beats about the bush before coming to the point, he does so to study the effect of his feelers on Nora; he can afford to take his time, because he is absolutely sure of his case.

Does Nora know what it means to commit forgery? It is as difficult to answer this question by a flat yes or no, as so many others that arise with respect to her character.

Krogstad says: "If I produce this document in court,

you will be condemned according to law." The naïveté of Nora's answer is remarkable. "I don't believe that. Do you mean to tell me that a daughter has no right to spare her dying father trouble and anxiety?—that a wife has no right to save her husband's life? I don't know much about the law, but I'm sure you'll find, somewhere or other, that that is allowed." In the final scene of the reckoning, it is significant to note, Nora admits that she has come to see that the laws are different from what she believed, but at the same time she defends the moral right of her act as vigorously as ever.

That does not settle the matter, however. We have to proceed cautiously, inasmuch as in other situations Nora is not quite so naïve as she would like to appear. She knows more about Doctor Rank's disease, for instance, than we would at first give her credit for. The same may well be the case here. A moment before that indignant outburst of hers, she refers to her act as a brave deed, when, repudiating Krogstad's intimation that he was blackballed by society for a similar act, she exclaims: "You! You want me to believe that you did a brave thing to save your wife's life?" What would be the point in calling her act a brave thing, we ask, if there were no risk involved, if it were not forbidden, if it could not get her into trouble? To Christina she had simply boasted of her act as something clever, refraining carefully at the same time from giving her any hint of the nature of the transaction.

And what of her reasons for guarding her secret so zealously all these years from Torvald? When Christina asks her: "And you have never confessed to your husband?" she jumps at the very thought of such a thing. She has *three* good reasons for not telling him right on the tip of her tongue—a circumstance in itself suspicious. "Good

heavens!" she exclaims, "What can you be thinking of? Tell him, when he is so strict on that point! And besides," she continues, "how painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly self-respect, to know that he owed anything to me! It would utterly upset the relation between us; our beautiful, happy home would never again be what it is." Anyhow, she goes on to say, it might be well to have something in reserve, in case the time should come when Torvald would not be in love with her as much as now, when it would no longer amuse him to see her dancing about and dressing up and acting. The second and third of these reasons are obviously of an auxiliary character. It is in the first that her immediate reaction is contained: she is afraid to tell Torvald. Now what is it, precisely, that she fears? So far as she is consciously aware, she fears Torvald's anger for her having run them into debt. But, heavens, she ought to be able to convince him that she did it to save his life, and Torvald would have to be a veritable ogre if he did not love his little lark the more for it. Everything points, I think, to her fear being more deeply rooted. I believe that Nora's consciousness of her forgery is the real instinctive source of her anxiety to keep the whole matter from her husband. Since she knows that her act has a feature of which Torvald would most sharply disapprove, even though she justifies it to herself, she dreads the idea of acquainting Torvald with even the relatively innocent side of the business.

This view is confirmed by the alacrity with which Nora's thoughts run to suicide, after Torvald's lecture on forgery has given her a foretaste of what to expect. She plays with the thought of suicide before it ever dawns upon her what a weapon for blackmail her indiscretion has put into Krogstad's hands. At the bottom of Nora's impulse to resort to

such desperate measures is her panicky fear of getting a terrible scolding. She is "scared stiff" at the idea of having to face Torvald's wrath. For the very reason that she loves him so passionately, she cannot bear the thought of his anger bursting upon her. She is in this respect like hypersensitive children, who have been known to run away from home or do something desperate rather than take a scolding from a person by whom they wished to be uncritically idolized. Nora feels that if she commits suicide, Torvald will be so overwhelmed by this extreme token of her devotion that her image will live radiant and spotless in his memory. It is with her essentially a matter of personal vanity, taking so extreme a form as to be easily confounded with the loftiest altruism. She would make a widower of Torvald and orphans of her children for the sake of being adored after her death as a plucky heroine. When it comes to the crucial test, to be sure, the will to live is stronger even than the fear of the wound her vanity is about to suffer.

I will allude only in passing to the shock Nora experiences when Krogstad shows his face at the front door for the first time, and again when he interrupts her game with the children. As subsequent events show, Krogstad's business with Nora was ordinarily transacted by way of the kitchen entrance. The peremptory tone in which she challenges him indicates her alarm over possibilities as yet not clearly defined.

But in the scene between Nora and Krogstad in the course of which her forgery comes to light, Nora's fear of exposure is clearly in evidence, coupled with reactions of another nature. The entire scene, showing Nora running through a whole gamut of emotions, gives us a most vivid intuition of her complex psychological make-up. Only a few moments before Krogstad's entrance, the realization of

her new dignity and importance as the partner of a man of tremendous influence, had affected her like champagne taken on an empty stomach. She had clapped her hands and chuckled and strutted about the room with a lordly swagger. To think that now she was such an influential person, and that this fellow Krogstad who had annoyed her so insufferably with his dunning calls was now at her mercy! Such an event had to be celebrated. She pulls the macaroons, that contraband article, out of her pocket, boldly passes them to Christina and Doctor Rank, and lies with more bravado than usual. She feels an irresistible impulse to swear, to be deliberately naughty. And when Torvald appears she invents, on the spur of the moment, a story about Christina's coming which sounds like lies and calculated flattery, but which at the moment she would be ready to swear to as true. Torvald's elevation to the post of bank director is an event of such enormous importance that Nora's imagination pictures the wires burning with the announcement and people flocking to the house to solicit the privilege of working under him. Now, when Krogstad enters, she is taken aback for an instant, but she quickly remembers her new importance. She receives him with the aloofness of the haughty lady coupled with the ill-concealed exultation of the child, as she hints broadly at her influence and delights in impressing upon him the fact that she is conscious of talking to one of the subalterns of her husband. She does not enjoy her sense of triumph undimmed very long; she becomes a trifle crestfallen when Krogstad asks her to use her alleged influence on his behalf. Now she would take back her rash boast, but this time he refuses to believe her. Krogstad is convinced that Nora has deliberately done him a nasty turn, that she has engineered his dismissal for Christina's sake and that she declines to use her

influence on his behalf merely because she dislikes him. So he proceeds to force her to act, by threatening to expose her secret to her husband. The complexity of Nora's reaction to this threat is very interesting. "It would be shameful of you," she exclaims, continuing with tears in her voice: "The secret that is my joy and my pride—that he should learn it in such an ugly, coarse way—and from you. It would involve me in all sorts of unpleasantness—." "Only unpleasantness?" Krogstad interrupts, but ignoring his insinuation, Nora continues hotly: "But just do it. It's you that will come off worst, for then my husband will see what a bad man you are, and then you certainly won't keep your place." Krogstad repeats: "I asked whether it was only domestic unpleasantness you feared?" And Nora, again pretending to miss the point of his question, answers: "If my husband gets to know about it, he will of course pay you off at once, and then we shall have nothing more to do with you." Krogstad is by no means anxious to reveal the matter to her husband; he does not want to extort blackmail if he can avoid it; he is all the more anxious, on the other hand, to impress Nora with the need of using her influence in his behalf, for her own safety. He therefore proceeds in a leisurely way to recapitulate the details of the transaction, fitting them together in such a way that Nora finds herself suddenly confronted with puncture-proof evidence of her forgery, without Krogstad's having to take the trouble to accuse her directly of anything. Lest we misinterpret the candor of her admission when the trap is actually sprung, we do well to note that she has recourse to lie and evasion up to the last moment. "I added a few lines," Krogstad's account had run in part, "making your father security for the debt. Your father was to sign this." "Was to?" Nora interrupts. "He did sign it!" And although she must have

an inkling by now of what he is leading up to, she makes one more effort to evade the issue. For, when Krogstad had gotten so far in his account as to remind her that he gave her the paper to send to her father by post, and that she must have done so at once, since she returned it within five or six days with her father's signature attached and received the money,—Nora, still feigning innocence, tries to sidetrack the issue by asking: "Well? Have I not made my payments punctually?" Only at the last, when she knows herself cornered, she throws back her head and says defiantly: "I wrote father's name."

The unfaltering directness of Nora's admission; the aggressive tactics with which she follows it up; her readiness to invoke the law in defense of her forgery; the air of injured innocence with which she pleads her cause—have led many intelligent readers to believe that Nora is as genuinely naïve as she would like to appear. I have already remarked that Nora's reference to her deed as something brave contradicts this supposition. Yet I would not go so far as to say that she is consciously lying. Nora has so little sense of fact and so much imagination that she can make herself believe practically anything she wants to. (The supreme instance of this faculty is the faith she develops in the miracle.) It is in her interests to appear wholly unconscious of any technical wrong-doing; to that end all she needs to do is to make herself just a little more infantile than she is. Any one who has had any experience with small children addicted to romancing knows that it would be beyond the ingenuity of a whole room full of supreme court justices to convince her that there was the faintest trace of play-acting in her contention that the law must sanction a wife's and mother's doing as she did. She throws herself into her rôle —if it can be called that—so ardently, that her solicitude

for her husband, her children and her father absolutely excludes all other responsibilities; so that to Krogstad's reminder that she was playing him false, she can reply without a quaver: "That was nothing to me. I didn't care in the least about you. I couldn't endure you for all the cruel difficulties you made, although you knew how ill my husband was."

After Krogstad's departure, Nora's abrupt fragments of monologue (a device to the use of which Ibsen returns freely in this drama) give us hints as to what is going on in her mind. "No, it's impossible! Why, I did it for love!" she murmurs to herself, as she takes up one piece of work after another in the effort to divert her mind from the hateful business. Evidently she is trying to fortify herself against doubts that the law may not be altogether as she represented it to Krogstad. Then, as she trims the Christmas tree, we catch another glimpse, this time more clearly, of her mental processes: "That horrible man! Nonsense, nonsense! there's nothing to be afraid of. The Christmas tree shall be beautiful. I'll do everything to please you, Torvald; I'll sing and dance, and—." The meaning of that concluding sentence is unmistakable. How Torvald is going to take the disclosure worries her; she is thinking of ways and means to diminish the force of the tempest that is bound to break.

Torvald enters. Now supposing for a moment that Nora showed her true face to Krogstad toward the end of their interview,—she is surely not going to lower herself by interceding for "that horrible man!" As a matter of fact, nothing is more certain than Nora's resolve to do everything in her power to make Krogstad keep his position. We have proof of that before Torvald says a word to enlighten Nora as to the gravity of forgery from the legal point of view. It

is a single word that gives away her intention, but a word is enough. When Torvald explains that he has already obtained authorization to effect what changes in the staff he contemplates before New Year's, Nora says: "Then that's why that poor Krogstad—." "Poor Krogstad," she finds it expedient to call him whom in her thoughts she abominates as "that horrible man!"

Having made sure of Nora's intention, we can return to the beginning of this scene. By a trick of chance the cards have been stacked against Nora. She has odds to fight against from the outset. Her plan of affecting spontaneous sympathy for Krogstad is nipped in the bud, because Torvald has seen Krogstad leave the house and surmised the purpose of his call. The fib in which Nora is unfortunate enough to be caught acts as a further irritant upon Torvald; hence she prudently reserves her efforts for a more opportune moment. Instead, she draws upon her natural arts of coquetry to restore Torvald's good humor by flattering his male vanity. She artfully brings up the topic of the masquerade ball; she confesses that her attempts to plan an effective costume have been a failure. She must know her Torvald pretty thoroughly, for the ruse works immediately. He is delighted at this show of feminine helplessness; it tickles him to see her in a quandary,—the result of relying on her own foolish little squirrel's brain. Then, after displaying an apparently casual interest in the papers he has brought from the bank, and throwing out her first timid feeler about "poor" Krogstad (it dies in her throat when Torvald interrupts with an expressive "h'm") she continues, as she slowly strokes his hair: "If you hadn't been so very busy, I should have asked you a great, great favor, Torvald." And his curiosity being aroused, she goes on: "Nobody has such perfect taste as you; and I should so love to

look well at the fancy ball. Torvald, dear, couldn't you take me in hand, and settle what I'm to be, and arrange my costume for me?" "Aha!" Torvald exclaims delightedly, "So my wilful little woman is at a loss, and making signals of distress." And he promises: "Well, well, I'll think it over, and we'll soon hit upon something." So Nora has carried off this little piece of diplomacy very creditably, and, again, without being more than half consciously aware of her play-acting; for she *is* in distress, and her thoughts, flying hither and thither, are unable to concentrate on the serious business of designing a costume.

Now, however, that she has made sure of Torvald's being in the best possible humor, she cannot refrain from bringing the Krogstad matter up again. She inquires timidly whether Krogstad has done anything so very dreadful, and she suggests extenuating motives for his forgery. Now the time has come for her to learn how the lawyer looks at such matters. Torvald's attitude is by no means inhuman, but he talks of forgery as a crime, irrespective of motives; and when he mentions punishment Nora understands very well that he thinks of the prison. Nora feels herself hit, when Torvald dilates in almost professorial fashion on the disastrous results to the delinquent and to society, when a criminal succeeds in evading punishment. And when Torvald discusses—what is evidently a favorite theory of his, that nearly all cases of early corruption may be traced to lying mothers, Nora's cheeks begin to burn. Having stated his generalizations, Torvald comes back to the specific case of Krogstad and winds up by stating that he could not tolerate such an individual on his staff. Then, turning to Nora with his usual endearing epithets, uttered this time with a singular earnestness (he lays his hand upon her head), he retires to his office.

Torvald's dissertation has left Nora stunned. Having never doubted the absoluteness of his judgment in serious matters, she is aghast at the vistas it opens up. Scarcely venturing to doubt her husband's dictum, yet rebelling against it with the full force of natural impulse, she is torn by the conflict. "It can't be. It's impossible. It must be impossible!" she whispers, and, after a pause, now pale with terror: "Corrupt my children!—Poison my home! (Short pause. She throws back her head.) It's not true! It can never, never be true!"—

It is the next afternoon when we meet Nora again—in the same room where the Christmas tree now stands tousled and bedraggled with candle drippings. Outwardly the situation is unchanged. Another attempt of Nora's, in the course of the morning, to intercede for Krogstad has failed flatly, but as yet he has undertaken no overt move against her. Nora's nerves, however, are tightening, as she feels the inevitable drawing nearer. To counteract her fears, she would persuade herself against her better judgment that Krogstad's threat is nothing but a bluff. "Stuff and nonsense!" she exclaims, having assured herself that the mail-box is still empty. "Of course he won't really do anything. Such a thing couldn't happen. It's impossible! Why, I have three little children."

What couldn't happen? we ask, puzzled by the peculiar cogency of the argument that she has three little children. What can it mean, save that she fears they will put her in jail? Any doubt on this point is removed when, at the sound of footsteps in the hall, we hear her scream: "Ah, there they come." How relieved she is when, instead of a whole detachment of police, it is only Christina!

But her talk with the nurse maid, before Christina arrives, shows her anticipating even more terrible consequences: in

the future she cannot occupy herself so much with the children as she has been in the habit of doing; they might even lose their mother altogether, poor things. Nora is evidently playing with the thought of suicide. We learn that Nora has denied herself the sight of the children all day. This shows what a serious impression Torvald's lecture has made upon her. She does not want to expose them to her contaminating influence, if it should actually turn out that she was so very wicked. It would probably be more correct to say that Nora snatches comfort from the thought of eventually producing this abstention as proof of how desperately hard she has been trying to be good since learning on the best authority that she had been a very wicked child. It is characteristic of Nora's psychology that she never considers the alternative means of showing her good will, namely the resolve to do no more fibbing.

If we listen attentively to Nora, as she chatters to Christina about her costume, we perceive to what diminutive proportions her ego has shrunk for the moment; it is as though it would creep entirely into the folds of her great Torvald's garments. Torvald wants her to appear as a Neapolitan fisher-girl; Torvald wishes it; Torvald had the costume made for her in Italy; Torvald has the art of making home bright and beautiful. Very soon, however, Nora's little ego ventures to peep out again, and before we know it, it is again frisking about in its usual impish way. It swells with importance, as Nora talks knowingly about Doctor Rank's disease. She stalks up and down, relishing the impression she makes on her shocked listener.

By turning the conversation on Doctor Rank, Christina suggests to Nora a means of escape from her embarrassment. Ever since Nora threw out the playful suggestion that she might have obtained the loan from an admirer,

Christina suspected that the Doctor was involved in Nora's secret. Now when she learns that the Doctor is mortally ill, she at once connects this fact with Nora's charming day-dream about the old gentleman who was to leave her all his money in his will. Natural curiosity, a rather meddlesome disposition, and a genuine desire to help, make her determine to get at the bottom of the matter. To her astonishment Nora disclaims any such thought as asking Doctor Rank for money having ever entered her head, and she is probably telling the truth; yet it is altogether likely that the Doctor's image had subconsciously determined the form of her day-dream. Now that the possibility of enlisting Doctor Rank's aid is actually suggested to her, she follows up the idea with alacrity. Her protest, that it would never have struck her to ask Doctor Rank, she supplements by adding: "And yet, I'm certain that if I did—." And a moment later, on the heels of a second warm disclaimer, she repeats: "But I'm quite sure that if I spoke to Doctor Rank—."

Just as we see Christina preparing to press her inquiry into Nora's secret, Torvald's footsteps are heard, and Nora, knowing her lord-and-master's jealous disposition, hustles her into the nursery. And now we see Nora pleading Krogstad's case for the last time. Conscious as she is of having failed twice before, her plea is half-hearted, and its tone carries admission of defeat beforehand. Her natural vivacity is paralyzed, her captivating sparkle is absent. Her manner has an irritating effect on Torvald, and he cuts her off brusquely. Driven to desperation, Nora now throws off the mask of sympathy and exhibits her naked fear of the disreputable journalist who, she points out, can do Torvald no end of harm. Torvald, thinking that her terror has its source in childhood memories of newspaper attacks lev-

eled against her father, is rather pleased by his little lark's exhibition of timidity, the more so as it affords him a chance to draw himself up to his full height and contrast his immaculate record with that of her father. He condescends, therefore, to enlighten her as to the real reasons that make Krogstad impossible at the bank. In the first place, it would not do for Torvald to lay himself open to suspicion of being under petticoat domination. But the decisive reason is Krogstad's obtrusive familiarity. The thought of this tactless fellow's calling him "Du, Du," every little while, in the presence of others, is something he cannot endure. We cannot repress a smile on seeing Torvald's motive for dismissing Krogstad boil down to this; in the language of the chemist: his outraged morality passes off as a gas, leaving as solid residue his desire to escape personal embarrassment. If we smile it is not because his argument lacks any element of reasonableness; what makes Torvald amusing is rather the fact that he divests himself in an unguarded moment of his fine moral drapery.

Nora's reception of Torvald's confidential disclosure completes the comedy. Having been wont to take his lofty moral professions at their face value, she finds the true reason petty by contrast. This is more than his male vanity can endure; so with a dramatic flourish he puts an end to all trifling by despatching the fatal letter on the spot. And now, having removed the imputed stigma by this bold gesture of manly independence, his wrath subsides, and he can listen to Nora's renewed expressions of terror with a certain relish. He can expound to her at his leisure that her fear of a wretched scribbler's revenge is, strictly speaking, an insult to him; and he can forgive his little lark this piece of folly because he is wise enough to see that it is sponsored by her immoderate love. And carried along as he is by

the flow of his oratory, he must exploit the occasion by capping the scene with a heroic-idyllic climax. "That's all as it should be, my own dear Nora," he says, taking her in his arms. "Let what will happen—when it comes to the pinch, I shall have strength enough. You shall see: my shoulders are broad enough to bear the whole burden."

*Nora.* (Terror-struck.) What do you mean by that?
*Helmer.* The whole burden, I say—
*Nora.* (With decision.) That you shall never, never do!
*Helmer.* Very well; then we'll share it, Nora, as man and wife. That is how it should be.

For Torvald these words were merely an exercise in self-expression, a pleasurable rehearsal of the heroic attitude in the face of a wholly imaginary danger. Little Nora, however, her mind filled with a horribly concrete danger, had felt their impact with the force of a thunderbolt. After Torvald has retired to his office, she stands as though rooted to the ground, bewildered with terror, and whispers: "He would do it. Yes, he would do it. He would do it, in spite of all the world. No, never that, never, never! Anything rather than that! Oh, for some way of escape!" We divine Nora's thoughts. Snatching at Torvald's words, she reads into them the assurance that if the worst comes to the worst, her husband-hero will shoulder the responsibility for her indiscretion. And this thought, scarcely conceived, becomes a conviction on which she fastens with the whole passionate ardor of her will-to-believe. It moves into the focus of her imaginings as the miracle, at once longed for and dreaded.

Before we continue our analysis, let us pause to register our æsthetic response to the crisis we see approaching. The material situation fills us with suspense, tinged with appre-

hension. Common sense tells us, however, that the consequences of Nora's exposure cannot be so very terrible. There is not a court in the civilized world but would show the utmost leniency to Nora, if it ever came to a criminal prosecution; and it is quite out of the question that she should suffer social disgrace. As to the little heroine, we contemplate her with mixed feelings. We identify ourselves with her, we feel the strain under which she is laboring, we respond sympathetically to her dread of being found out; but at the same time we are diverted by her half-conscious play-acting. Our sympathy for Nora is balanced by our delight in the comedy which she stages. The psychological relation between Nora and Torvald, finally, is essentially comic. The incongruity between the heroic Torvald of Nora's dreams and the smug, conceited philistine of actual fact is all the more subtly amusing, as the contrast is not reinforced in the slightest by any artificial stress.

We have arrived at the unforgettable scene between Nora and Doctor Rank—a scene unforgettable, at any rate, to any one who has pondered over it in the passionate quest for the key to ultimate mysteries of the feminine soul. But for the fact that it is after all a man who is the author of this scene, a mere male would well-nigh despair of intuitively fathoming the erratic emotional play of this elfish creature. A moment before the Doctor enters, Nora is in a panic to prevent Torvald's sacrificing himself for her, whatever the cost. Yet when Rank's declaration of love is about to drop the fulfilment of her wish into her outstretched hand, she shuts her little fist without a moment's hesitation. When Rank enters, Nora is nervous and fidgety; her mind is so preoccupied with her own danger that she construes all his remarks about his impending dissolution as veiled references to the fate that awaits her. Discovering at last that the

Doctor has been talking about himself, her relief is so great that the pathos of his situation does not penetrate to her consciousness. She is merely annoyed to find him in such a bad humor at a moment when she is planning to ask him for a tremendous favor. So she calls her coquetry into play. She wants him to think on the morrow that she is executing her dance exclusively for him (and for Torvald, of course), and she teases him with the sight of her flesh-colored silk stockings. As Rank responds now with his declaration of love, the Platonic nature of which is too obvious to question, we expect Nora to confess her trouble in the full assurance that whatever she asks will be granted. Instead of this, the confidential smile vanishes from her lips; in a moment her manner has become formal, even distant. She rises, crosses over to the stove, and calls for the lamp. And then she upbraids the Doctor for his confession. She does not mind his loving her, she admits, but his telling her was so unnecessary. To his eager query, whether she already knew, she replies: "Oh, how can I tell what I knew or didn't know? I really can't say— How could you be so clumsy, Doctor Rank? It was all so nice!"

What is at the bottom of Nora's fantastic reaction to a confession of love which could scarcely shock the most prudish? Does Nora interpret it as a reflection on her virtue? Does she feel that her toleration of even a Platonic lover would infringe upon her fidelity to Torvald? Is she influenced, perhaps, by the conventional view that it is not nice for a woman to accept money from a lover? Or does she feel that to accept a favor from Rank now, after he has spoken, would obligate her to return his sentiments, which she cannot do? Or again, does she consider it presumptuous on Rank's part that he should put himself, as it were, on a level with her adored Torvald, by matching his alleged

willingness to sacrifice his life for her? Who will say with assurance that any or all of these motives did not ruffle the surface of her mind, when she turned so curtly? Yet somehow none of these reasons seem sufficiently close to elemental impulse to account for so prompt a face-about. As a matter of fact we have in this scene another striking illustration of Nora's vivid imagination outrunning her sense of fact. Her keen disappointment over Rank's declaration of love has really nothing to do with moral considerations. Her reproach, "How could you be so clumsy, Doctor Rank?" has none of the flavor of a moral rebuke; it points rather to her æsthetic sensibilities having been offended by his speaking out. In rehearsing the impending scene in her imagination, Nora had assigned a very definite rôle to Doctor Rank; now it peeves her to see him bungle his part, unmindful of the fact that her own deliberate toying with his feelings had provoked the declaration that annoyed her. "Rank would be high-minded," she had imagined. "He would give her money, exactly as it happens in novels; he would be moved by her beauty to grant her everything, without demanding anything in return. But, alas, her dream about the generous donor is spoiled by his stupid lack of comprehension. Instead of understanding her in silence—for thus it behooves the true knight—Rank presents her with a declaration of love. If that were what she wanted, she could have had it long ago. She need not have gone to the trouble of showing her stockings for this. Since this man has so little poetic imagination, since he is so incapable of reading in her heart, she does not care to ask him for help." [2] Only a woman of Nora's romantic imagination could throw herself so earnestly into the spirit of the game,

[2] Georg Groddeck: "Tragödie oder Komödie," pp. 26-7. S. Hirzel, Leipzig, 1910. (My translation.)

as to lose sight of the practical purpose for which she had staged the scene, and to quit in a huff when her partner disgusts her by bungling his rôle. And it is all of a piece with Nora's personality that two minutes after so keen a disappointment she should be eyeing the Doctor with her quizzical smile as she rocks herself, gloating impishly over his discomfiture, and punishing him with evident relish by keeping obstinately silent about her secret. For the time being she is so taken up with the amusing aspect of the situation that all danger seems remote and she can afford to laugh at her fear as an imaginary bogey. When Nora tells Rank: "You can do nothing to help me now. Besides, I really want no help. You shall see it was only my fancy. Yes, it must be so. Of course!"—she is not simply trying to pacify the Doctor's curiosity: she is actually convinced that she has been exaggerating the danger enormously and that Krogstad's threats are nothing but a bluff. But will Nora's refusal to avail herself of Doctor Rank's help hold out when it comes to a showdown? We shall presently see.

The servant-girl announces something to Nora in a whisper, and Nora, fibbing with her usual presence of mind, gets rid of the Doctor and bolts the door to Torvald's offices. Krogstad is in the kitchen, waiting for admittance. Nora knows that her hour has struck. "It is coming! The dreadful thing is coming, after all," she whispers to herself before he enters.

She faces the ordeal with outward calm, braced by the resentment she harbors against her mean tormentor. Too proud to sue for mercy, she nevertheless exploits every opportunity to work on Krogstad's sympathies. When he hints at the possibility that she may be harboring a desperate resolve, she admits it with an alacrity—imperfectly rendered by the English translation—which reveals her hope of tying

his hands by the threat of suicide. And her subsequent admission that she has not the courage,—far from contradicting this implication, shows her doing her utmost to take advantage of what looks like a softening on his part. It is just this; not for a moment does she feel a bond of common humanity bridging the gulf between her and the moneylender; not for a moment would it occur to her to feel anything like gratitude, in case she succeeded in making him relent. If he now stopped tormenting her, she would feel the same relief as upon escaping from an angry hornet, and the same indifference as to what became of him afterwards.

Nora chooses to misunderstand Krogstad just so long as she finds it possible to put a construction on his words in keeping with her will-to-believe. His protest that he is indifferent to the money now, has made no impression on her. When he mentions the letter in his pocket, she is eager to resort to the means she declined to use a few moments ago. She offers to get the money, not simply the amount of her debt but any sum he may choose to name, confident as she is that Rank will not fail her. It is futile; to her terror she learns how much more powerful an instrument of blackmail her secret will be to Krogstad. Nothing less will now satisfy him than to use Torvald as a stepping-stone for his own return to power. She shudders at this, realizing as she does, that her own doom is now inevitable. To save Torvald from ruin she must pass out of existence, and now she feels sure that she has the courage. It is too late now for even a frank confession to Torvald to undo the harm. She learns furthermore that not even the sacrifice of her life will be sufficient to free Torvald, in case she should die without leaving a witness.

The final scene of the act shows Nora keyed to an almost insupportable pitch of tension. She has confessed her secret

to Christina, in the baldest words. The fatal letter is in the box, and all her efforts are now bent on delaying as long as possible the inevitable catastrophe. Just in the nick of time, as Torvald is on the point of getting his mail, Nora strikes the first notes of the tarantella, causing him to turn; and now follows her wild, hysterical dance, a dance of life and death, transforming into spontaneous movement her delirious ecstasy of self-sacrifice and her frenzied terror. Nora is dancing for a stay of execution, she wants to live until after the party. She pleads with Torvald to forget business and devote himself exclusively to her until it is all over; and as her fate hangs in the balance, a whisper from Rank to her uncomprehending husband turns the scales, and she wins her reprieve. Nora's delirium has reached its highest pitch. She calls for champagne. She is in no state of mind to care any longer for the good offices of Christina, who has just left a note at Krogstad's house. "You shouldn't have done that," she says. "You shall prevent nothing. After all, there's something glorious in waiting for the miracle." And left alone, she ascertains that she has exactly thirty-one more hours to live.

I do not suppose that anybody can resist the hypnotic power of Nora's anguish on reading or seeing the play for the first time with alert vision. There is a finality about her heroic resolve that silences doubt. The impulsive generosity of her imagination captivates our sympathies as completely as though she had already cast herself into the icy black water. We give her practically as much credit for the impulse as for its execution.

But here it is time to remind ourselves that, after all, Nora did not take the fatal plunge. I anticipate resentful objections, but it will be conceded that the fact is undeniable. Nora's failure to commit suicide is, moreover, not the

result of circumstances beyond her control; it is clearly due to her inability to carry out her heroic resolve when it comes to the actual test. She wants to go, but her courage fails her at the decisive moment. Instead of going resolutely, as soon as Torvald has retired to his office, she lingers, she thinks of all she is leaving behind, she shudders at the thought of the black water and wishes it were over. That is not the state of mind in which suicides are committed. That is the state of mind, however, in which one thinks of suicide, dreams of it, imagines it. To the last moment Nora is positively convinced that she will go: as a matter of fact she is romancing with the whole intensity of her imagination! Hot tears of indignation would come to little Nora's eyes, could she hear herself being thus analyzed; yet her tears could not obliterate the clear reading of the facts.

Far be it from me to belittle the agony she endures during those awful moments of suspense or the anguish of the last thirty-one hours. However, if we survey the dramatic spectacle with sufficient detachment; if we maintain intact our clearness of vision despite the suggestive appeal of her big childish eyes, the situation never loses its fundamentally comic aspect.

In following the movements of this winsome little woman throughout the first two acts with that dual attitude of warm sympathy controlled by superior detachment, which constitutes the æsthetic attitude, we beheld an intricate blending of naïveté and play-acting in all her doings; we found her charmingly lacking in sense of fact and endowed with a captivating sprightliness of fancy. Her adroitness in playing a psychological game of hide-and-seek with herself as well as with Torvald, Christina, Rank and Krogstad, made a subtle appeal to our sense of the comic. We found the quality of comedy in her spontaneous lying, in the automatic

duplicity of all her reactions: in the motives by which she obscured her basic fear of a scolding; in her warm defense of her forgery as something entirely within the law; in her refusal to see the children whom she is supposed to be corrupting; in her faculty of persuading herself that Krogstad was only bluffing; in her first thoughts of suicide, when as yet her alarms were confined to the fear of a scolding and of the police; in her eager misinterpretation of Torvald's boast that he was man enough to shoulder it all; in her coquetry with Doctor Rank. Does not all this give us sufficient warrant for viewing her faith in the miracle and her heroic resolve to prevent it, from the same aspect? Are not these also figments of her will-to-believe—creations of her great gift of romancing under the strain of duress? Are they not comic?

What is the basis of Nora's expectation of the miracle? Stark fear. At the outset, before she is aware of any trouble looming in consequence of her forgery, she is animated by a sensitive child's dread of a scolding. The fear of unpleasant consequences grows, as she learns that Krogstad is in possession of her secret. After Torvald's lecture on the seriousness of forgery, Nora's fear (now not only of Torvald but also of the law) grows to such proportions that she already plays with the thought of suicide. Precisely because her fear is so great, so unendurable, she snatches at the fiction of the miracle to neutralize it. Her faith in the miracle is the direct product of her hysterical terror. Even more necessary does this faith become to her, when she learns what dire consequences her indiscretion will have for Torvald. We can state it in general terms: Nora's faith in the miracle grows in direct proportion to her need of it.

The miracle, however, does not stand by itself. Simultaneous in origin, directly attached to it as a corollary, is

Nora's generous resolve not to permit it. So strong is her love for Torvald that, the nearer the moment of his ruin draws, the more fixed is her determination rather to commit the supreme sacrifice.

And yet the one as well as the other are make-believe—attempts to escape unpleasant facts by ardent romancing. The fact that Nora tries to pick the lock of the mail-box with her hair-pin, on the day preceding the fatal night, shows how she shrinks from putting her theories to the test. Then, too, it occurs to us to ask: Supposing Nora did believe genuinely—and not with a hysteric's will-to-believe—that Torvald would claim her forgery as his own, why does she let him learn it from a blackmailer's letter, when she knows the hour of her doom to have struck? Would it not have been beautiful to slip out and die, after having beheld the miracle? However, to Christina's final admonition: "You have nothing to fear from Krogstad; but you must speak out," Nora replies: "I shall not speak," showing that her dread of confessing was insuperable. As a matter of fact, if we take her resolve to commit suicide seriously, the miracle of which she dreams cannot possibly come about. Supposing she had rushed to the bridge while Torvald was reading the letter,—was he to go straightway to the police and denounce himself as a forger, instead of first ascertaining what had become of her? The first thought of a loving husband would surely be to make a frantic search for his missing wife. Torvald's first move would have been to alarm Christina, and she would have lost no time in acquainting him with what she knew of Nora's state of mind. Would it not have been ridiculous after that for Torvald to advertise himself as the forger, knowing that Christina's testimony would straightway expose his claim as false? Thus Nora was actually leaving no opportunity for heroic

conduct open to Torvald, except for him to proclaim eventually: "I would have taken her deed upon myself, had she given me a chance." There is no helping the conclusion: On the basis of Nora's resolve to commit suicide, the miracle, both longed for and dreaded, turns out to be the quixotic product of a generous but hysterical imagination; and since Nora's resolve to sacrifice herself has the enactment of the miracle for its presupposition, the former turns out to be of the same unsubstantial fabric as the latter.

I have anticipated developments. Let us now review the third act in orderly sequence. There is to begin with the scene between Krogstad and Christina, which results in averting the material danger that threatened the Helmer household. Krogstad will lose no time to make amends for his dastardly letter. The harmonious mutual adjustment, moreover, which these two shipwrecked existences come to, seems to foreshadow a happy solution of the crisis that Nora and Torvald are about to face.

For a moment our attention is diverted to the little secondary drama enacted between the two one-time lovers whom life's storms have used so roughly. It seems just a trifle providential that the sentimental crook and widowed father of a flock of children should meet his lost love at this critical juncture,—herself widowed and utterly alone and longing for somebody to love and mother. We can take Christina at her word when she reassures Krogstad that her offer is not prompted by any desire to sacrifice herself for Nora's sake. Hungering for a task to fill the aching void of her existence, she snatches at the merest crumb of affection. A missionary by temperament, she will have something to live for, in mothering the children and guiding Krogstad on the straight and narrow path of righteousness. Christina is to be sincerely congratulated on her decision, for the sake

of everybody concerned; yet, somehow, the chilling soberness of her tightly drawn lips and the total absence of charm in her prematurely aged features tend to limit our reactions to sentiments of polite esteem.

How completely the atmosphere changes with the return of the masqueraders after the tarantella! Poor Nora, dragged away from life's banquet against her will, almost succumbs to hysteria; whereas Torvald, bubbling and sparkling with champagne, treats us to a most diverting spectacle. In the rosiest of humors, at the peak of that blissful state of stimulation where the quality of the audience no longer exercises a regulative check on the flow of expression, he plants himself before Christina and, in a voice raised just a shade above his normal intonation, gives her an impromptu "privatissimum" on the æsthetics of an effective exit. And half a minute later, when Christina prepares to depart, in response to a fairly direct hint on Torvald's part, he condescends to give the good woman a friendly tip on the sort of handiwork she must choose to appear to advantage. It fairly makes us squirm with amusement to see him demonstrate the graceful motions of embroidering and follow it up by imitating the narrow-chested attitude of the knitter.

The "terrible bore" gone at last, Torvald can give free play to his amorous impulses. Turning to his little lark, he showers her with words of passionate endearment. Under the influence of the wine, even Torvald falls to romancing: he loves to exchange a furtive glance with Nora in company and imagine himself her secret lover; when he takes her home it thrills him to pretend to himself that he has just stepped out of the church with his young bride after the ceremony, and that the first moment of complete intimacy is at hand. From the outsider's point of view there is always something a trifle comic about such amorous over-

tures in a domestic setting; but here the comedy derives its peculiar poignancy from the incongruity between the wine-inspired ardor of the passionate male and the ultra-heroic pose which Nora expects him presently to adopt.

Nora is in no state of mind to see the humor of the situation. She is on the verge of exhaustion. "I shall soon sleep now," she says, putting a double meaning into her words. "Everything you do is right," she tells Torvald with the pathos of complete resignation. She gently but firmly repulses his advances, until Torvald finally exclaims in irritation: "What does this mean? I daresay you're teasing me, little Nora! Won't—won't! Am I not your husband?"

The chivalrous swain who a moment ago waxed lyrical in his wooing has vanished. In his place stands the lord-and-master, asserting his rights. It is a critical moment. It almost seems as if Nora were due at once for a rude awakening from her illusions concerning her husband-hero's capacity for self-sacrifice. However, the crisis is averted by the knock on the hall door.

The brief scene that follows, in which Doctor Rank bids a final farewell to his friends, is one of the summits of Ibsen's art. On the strength of this scene alone, Ibsen takes rank among the immortals. I doubt whether any poet has penned a more concentrated vision of the tragi-comedy of human life, whether any contriver of moods has struck a greater variety of chords in the compass of a single phrase. With each of the three participants we behold the scene from a different perspective: from the low perspective of Torvald, who accounts for his friend's whimsical humor by the reflection that he has drunk heavily; from that of Rank, who is sustained in his heroic stage-play by the consciousness of Nora's silent admiration; from that of Nora, who shares with Rank the secret of his mystification of Tor-

vald and who mystifies the Doctor in turn by her equivocal allusions to her own secret, which he cannot understand. But in addition, in a sense denied to the participants themselves, we see the comic, tragic and tragi-comic interplay of their emotions from the cosmic perspective of the poet. From this high perspective even the grim specter of death is reduced to a function in what is essentially comedy of the most sublime order—comedy that transcends in its blending of sympathy with vision the appeal of tragedy. Do we not see the mellow light of comedy suffusing the Doctor in his gallant counter-demonstration against the terrors of death? Do we not see him enjoying the effect of his *tour de force* upon the woman he loves so dearly? Do we not see him smile inwardly in anticipating how Torvald will appreciate the effectiveness of his exit when he wakes up to the significance of that studiedly casual farewell? And is it not our turn to smile tolerantly at the delusion of the dying man, when, as a matter of fact, both Torvald and Nora are so preoccupied—he with the male's amorous desire, she with the thought of her own heroic exit—that the effectiveness of his gesture is largely lost on them both? In this scene the poet's laughter at the limitation of these three mortals is the laughter of the gods, musical and benign and without malice.

As Torvald and Nora are alone once more, we are about to witness the release of the tension which we have seen tightening from act to act and from scene to scene. These last moments of suspense add some exquisite touches to the comedy. In attempting to open the mail-box, Torvald finds Nora's broken hair-pin in the lock, and automatically Nora explains its presence there by a fib that puts the blame on her innocent little ones. For those readers who would persuade themselves that Nora has been maturing by leaps

under the mental anguish of the last three days, this instinctive resorting to subterfuge at the crucial moment is something to reflect on. And when she hears Torvald exclaiming about his find in the box, Nora is once more in the throes of terror. "The letter! Oh, no, no, Torvald!" she ejaculates. But it is only Rank's cards marked with the black cross, which have startled him. Nora explains the significance of those cards, and we now see how Torvald is affected by the news that his dearest friend has departed for ever. He rises to a few words of regret. His second thought is the reflection that the somber background which had hitherto set off his domestic happiness so effectively has now vanished; his third, that it is better after all for himself and Nora to belong exclusively to each other. What perfunctory mourning! And yet, can we respond to this exhibition of self-complacent vanity and egotism with righteous indignation? After all, is it not substantially what was to be expected of Torvald? It is not as though we were shocked by any sudden revelation of his real character. Being sufficiently forewarned, we view this naïvely genuine expression of his egotism from the angle of comedy, and the comic aspect of the situation is enhanced by the reflection that an excess of wine and amorous desire is making Torvald impervious, for the time being, to all finer emotions. To make the comic spectacle complete, Nora drinks in Torvald's hollow oratory with worshipful adoration, and it remains for the most fatuous of his phrases to send so powerful a thrill through Nora's heart, as to lift her above her fears and animate her with a gambler's sudden courage to invoke the decision.

"My darling wife!" Torvald had exclaimed, capping his reflections on the loss of his friend with a theatrical climax. "Do you know, Nora, I often wish some danger might

threaten you, that I might risk body and soul, and everything, everything, for your dear sake."

"Now you shall read your letters, Torvald," comes Nora's firm answer. Standing so positively committed to any sacrifice, how can he fail her, if asked to make good his words, before his ardor has had any chance to cool?

Alas, we know what cruel sport reality makes of Nora's romantic dreams! Nora herself quails when the moment arrives for putting her own heroic resolve into execution and the Torvald who rushes out of his office, flourishing Krogstad's letter, is not her hero but the enraged philistine. There is no mistaking the dangerous glint in his eye: still Nora continues to cling with a hysteric's frenzy to her illusions. As a silly evasion Torvald has already brushed aside her plea that she loved him beyond all else in the world; yet her lips murmur the entreaty: "Let me go—you shall not save me! You shall not take my guilt upon yourself!"

"I don't want any melodramatic airs," is Torvald's rejoinder, and now Nora's expression stiffens under the shower of abusive reproach with which Torvald overwhelms her. The scales fall from her eyes, as she hears herself styled a hypocrite, a liar, a criminal; as she learns that Torvald will submit to Krogstad's blackmail as a matter of course, bent only upon hushing matters up; as she is told that their domestic happiness is irretrievably ruined, that the children will no longer be entrusted to her care, that the only thing left to save is appearances.

The rudeness of Nora's awakening, contrasting cruelly with the generous, high-minded impulses which she was conscious of harboring, puts the mental faculties of us readers to a severe test. If, in response to the surge of our sympathies, we are already on the point of abandoning the

serene perspective of comedy, in order to swell the chorus of the mob by shouting "bully" and "cad" at Torvald in our turn, let us remember: Torvald does not know what we know about the circumstances of Nora's forgery! He has never known that the journey to the south was undertaken to save his life. For seven years he has been viewing that trip in an altogether different light. At the time when he was suffering from a breakdown, the result of overwork and financial worry, his flighty, pleasure-loving squirrel of a wife had set herself on spending a year in Italy like other wives of her social station; she had wept and prayed to make him borrow the funds, and his inability to indulge her had aggravated his miseries, when suddenly her father's gift had put the means of gratifying her wish within his reach. Fancy the shock of his learning now, from a blackmailer's pen, by what methods she had secured her year abroad! And even if Krogstad's letter, as there are grounds for supposing, alluded to his sickness as an extenuating motive for Nora's rash deed,—would that explanation, coming from such a source, at such a time, carry any weight as compared to the knockdown force of the initial shock? Torvald has no inkling, either, of the agony she has been enduring the last three days. Granting his lack of intuition, which stands above discussion, is he so very much to blame for being disgusted, in the first heat of his anger, by her melodramatic offer to kill herself?—Now let us consider how he proposes to meet the situation. Torvald has no other thought than the impulsive conviction that he must submit to blackmail to avoid publicity at all costs. Not for a moment does he hesitate to shoulder the consequences of Nora's indiscretion, no matter how nauseating the prospect of being dependent on the dirty usurer's mercy. Let those who call him a cad reflect on the bitterness of the sacrifice

he is ready to assume as a matter of course. I grant that he is following the line of least resistance; that he is thinking as much of his own reputation as of Nora's; that his way of meeting the issue is neither original nor courageous. A man of very exceptional caliber might have defied Krogstad to do his worst, preferring to stand by his wife through gossip and scandal and a criminal prosecution even, rather than ignominiously come to terms. But as to the third, the heroic course which Nora expected Torvald to adopt—that he should denounce himself as the forger:—almost everybody but Nora must agree on a little calm reflection that it would have been quixotic, not to say idiotic, since such a course would have spelt sure ruin for them both. Now some one is sure to interrupt: "No one actually expects Torvald to shoulder the forgery; what makes him a cad is rather the fact that he does not even experience a spontaneous impulse to meet the situation in that generous way, prior to all reflection on its actual feasibility." That might be urged if Torvald knew of the generous impulses that sponsored Nora's deed in the first place, and if he knew of the agony that has lately been driving her to the brink of suicide. But since he knew nothing of all this, is it not a trifle foolish to be exercised with Nora over Torvald's failure to live up to her expectation of the miracle?

So the situation remains fundamentally comic. Comic is the incongruity between Nora's and Torvald's respective states of mind, the absence of a common denominator to their thinking making it impossible for either to catch the other's point of view. And comic, in the second place, is the contrast between Torvald's professions and his actions. As to the latter, we experience the delight of finding our expectations confirmed to a "T." Torvald's heroism turns out to be strictly a matter of oratory, and the texture of his

superior morality has already provoked our mirth by the coming to light of the underlying personal motives that prompted his dismissal of Krogstad. As we hear him ranting now, we know that his indignation is due in far greater measure to the material consequences which Nora's indiscretion will entail for him than to the iniquity of the act.

Krogstad's second letter quickly supplies the proof. The danger annulled, Torvald is completely transformed. "I am saved! Nora, I am saved!" he shouts. The ominous calm of Nora's rejoinder, "And I?" fails to stem the oratorical flow of jubilation which now pours from his lips. And with the incubus of fear removed, Krogstad's allusion, in his second letter, to Nora's desperate state of mind is also able to take effect. "He said that ever since Christmas eve," Torvald begins to quote, "—Oh, Nora, they must have been three terrible days for you!" Torvald's heart wells up in sympathy—the protective sympathy of the superior male. He assures her of his forgiveness. The thought that she did it for love of him is sweet incense to his nostrils. He finds her doubly attractive in her womanly helplessness. And as Nora retires to take off her masquerade dress, we see Torvald strutting up and down near the door, comfortably settled again in his heroic pose, striking attitudes that send a quiver through one's diaphragm. "My scared little song bird," he apostrophizes her. "I have broad wings to shield you. . . . Here I can shelter you like a hunted dove whom I have saved from the claws of the hawk. . . . Oh, you don't know a true man's heart, Nora! There is something indescribably sweet and soothing to a man in having forgiven his wife—honestly forgiven her from the bottom of his heart."

A minute later we see husband and wife seated at opposite sides of the table, Torvald staring in blank surprise, as

the cold, set expression of Nora's face backs up her statement that the time has come for a final settlement.

If I have been successful in showing "A Doll's House" to be high comedy of the subtlest order up to this point, our vision will not be put to any particular strain to see the genius of comedy hovering over the scene of the settlement. If we see Torvald as neither a cad nor a villain, but as a worthy, honest citizen as citizens go, a careful provider, a doting husband, unimaginative, but scarcely a shade less so than the average male, self-complacent and addicted to heroic stage-play—a habit fostered by the uncritical adoration of his mate; if Nora is to us not the tragic heroine as which she is commonly pictured, but an irresistibly bewitching piece of femininity, an extravagant poet and romancer, utterly lacking in sense of fact, and endowed with a natural gift for play-acting which makes her instinctively dramatize her experiences:—how can the settlement fail of a fundamentally comic appeal? We can follow Nora's indictment of Torvald and conventional man-governed society with the most alert sympathy; we can be thrilled by her spirited gesture of emancipation; we can applaud her bravery; we can enjoy watching Torvald's bluffed expression turn gradually into a hangdog look of contrition as he winces under her trouncing and gets worsted in every phase of the argument: and we will be aware at the same time that Nora is enjoying the greatest moment of her life—the supreme thrill that is tantamount, in fact, to a fulfillment of her hunger for the miracle!

Not the least among the items contributing to the comedy is the fact that Nora scores with even the most questionable of her accusations, thanks to the dash of her unexpected invective. "You have never understood me," she charges. Nothing could be truer; but how was he to understand her,

when she played the lark and the squirrel with such spontaneous zest? How was he to divine her capacity for devotion, when she delighted in acting the incorrigible spendthrift, when it amused her to make him believe that the money he gave her simply melted between her fingers, when she played a perpetual game of hide-and-seek—and played it so effectively because play-acting was second nature to her? Now she blames him for not having treated her as a serious, responsible person, whereas all her efforts had heretofore been bent on appearing charmingly irresponsible. Past master of the arts of feminine coquetry, she is fully persuaded that she has cultivated these little tricks only under the pressure of male egotism, as if they were not a fundamental part of her instinctive endowment. And she gravely distributes the blame for having made the desire to please the supreme rule of her conduct, between Torvald and her father. Incidentally, her charge that in all the years of their marriage they have never exchanged one serious word about serious things, is incorrect: she has quite forgotten how seriously Torvald lectured her on the subjects of forgery and lying less than three days ago. If what she means is rather that they have never discussed any of their domestic problems in the spirit of serious partnership, it would seem that she were at least as much to blame for this as Torvald. Similarly, when she claims that her tastes in all matters are nothing but a reflection of those of her husband, she is certainly deluding herself. She very cleverly inculcated the idea in Torvald that she was dependent on his counsel even in such matters as choosing a fancy dress costume; but to be convinced that it is in reality her taste which is reflected in the cozy interior of their flat, scarcely requires so direct a hint as her chatter in the first scene, where she says: "And now I'll tell you how I think we ought to

plan things, Torvald. As soon as Christmas is over . . ." The ring at the door cuts her short, but we can wager that she had a whole bagful of suggestions on refurnishing and redecorating the apartment on a scale in keeping with their enlarged income; and Torvald would not be the man he is, if he did not follow the lead of his little charmer.

She has never been happy, she now discovers. She had thought herself happy for eight years, but now it appears that she has been only merry. You are mistaken, dear Nora, we are obliged to reply. If your happiness now turns out to have been based on an illusion, its present collapse can not touch feelings that have become part of the irrevocable past. As we see, Nora brings the same intense will-to-believe to the reinterpretation of her past, as had supported her so recently in her expectation of the miracle. She is the same play-acting, hysterical Nora she always was, only: she has now changed her dress.

There is melodrama in Nora's calm announcement that she is going to leave her husband. She extracts all the thrills she possibly can from the situation. She has lived with a strange man for eight years, and borne three children to a stranger; she will not stay another night under a stranger's roof; she will not take a cent of Torvald's money, for she accepts no gifts from strangers; he must not even write to her; she returns his ring and demands her own, as a symbol of the total severance of their relations. Even the thought of her children, to whom she is devotedly attached, can not budge her from her determination. "I know they are in better hands than mine," she says, referring evidently to the old nursemaid of whose educative talent Nora is herself the most striking product.

One miracle Nora has undeniably accomplished. She has seen her husband, strutting lately in a pose of self-com-

placent heroism, wilt under the withering fire of her words. She has seen his conceited pride shrink and dwindle and disappear altogether. She has seen his face register shame, contrition and abject humility. The suggestive power of the words in which she voiced her sense of injury has been so intense as to turn his initial resistance into a complete rout. Succumbing to the hypnotic spell of her personality, he accepts her version of the facts as the truth. (And there is not a reader of "A Doll's House," I daresay, who has not equally succumbed to that spell at one time or other.) When Nora makes her dramatic exit, she is conscious of having scored a complete psychological victory. Torvald's final gesture is one of unconditional surrender.

The conclusion is skillfully timed. The drop of the curtain finds us in a state of comic elation; for, whatever we think of the logic of Nora's arguments, we enjoy the victory of the superior, if erratic individual over the representative of commonplace respectability. And we are the less inclined to begrudge Nora the completeness of her triumph, as our imagination leaps ahead to speculate on the reaction that is bound to set in on the next day.

I would not predict with dogmatic certainty what is going to happen. It is barely possible that not even Christina's sober counsels will succeed in dissuading Nora from leaving her home. In that case, granted that she succeeds in finding employment, will she find the tedium of the daily routine endurable? Working in earnest for a living will not provide any of the thrills of those nights of secret copy-work that made her remark to Christina: "Sometimes I was so tired, so tired. And yet it was so awfully amusing[3] to work

[3] The original "uhyre morsomt," literally: awfully amusing, is rendered in the English text—very ineptly, it seems to me—by the word "splendid."

in that way and earn money. I almost felt as if I were a man." It is hard to picture Nora as a bank clerk or a telephone operator, but it is harder to think of her playing the part for more than three days at a time. Other possibilities come to mind, too. One can choose to think of Nora taking to the lecture platform, agitating for the emancipation of woman. Or, again, she may find a lover and weave new romances about a new hero.

But personally I am convinced that after putting Torvald through a sufficiently protracted ordeal of suspense, Nora will yield to his entreaties and return home—on her own terms. She will not bear the separation from her children very long, and her love for Torvald, which is not as dead as she thinks, will reassert itself. For a time the tables will be reversed: a meek and chastened husband will eat out of the hand of his squirrel; and Nora, hoping to make up by a sudden spurt of zeal for twenty-eight years of lost time, will be trying desperately hard to grow up. I doubt, however, whether her volatile enthusiasm will even carry her beyond the stage of resolutions. The charm of novelty worn off, she will tire of the new game very rapidly and revert, imperceptibly, to her rôle of song-bird and charmer, as affording an unlimited range to the exercise of her inborn talents of coquetry and play-acting.

Our interpretation of "A Doll's House" as a comedy has been derived exclusively from the text of the finished play as it stands. Any other procedure would have violated the cardinal principles of the æsthetic attitude. We could not permit the philologist's approach to interfere with the task in hand, except to check the accuracy of the English version and to correct the phrasing where it did not sufficiently render the spirit of the original. We proceeded in our study

on the assumption that the characters and the situation passing in review before our mind's eye called for as unbiased and objective a response as though we were assisting at a spectacle being enacted in real life—an infinitely keener and more objective response, as a matter of fact, since we were able to retard the movement of the action and repeat it at will, instead of being at the mercy of just a single impression, reinforced by the untrustworthy working of memory.

Now, with the fact established, that the spectacle of "A Doll's House" strikes us as comedy of the subtlest order (I beg the reader's indulgence for my assumption that he is won over to the same persuasion), we can conclude our study by an examination of two questions concerning the author's attitude to the product of his creative imagination. Did Ibsen originally set out to write a comedy? is our first question; and if this has to be answered in the negative, we ask: Was Ibsen aware of the play's turning into a comedy under his hands?

There can be no ambiguity about the answer to be returned to the first question. Ibsen began the treatment of his theme in dead earnest. His preliminary jottings for the play, a couple of speeches delivered at that time, and the first complete draft of "A Doll's House" speak a very clear language on this point.

Ibsen's earliest notes on the theme of "A Doll's House"—a few short paragraphs dated October 19th, 1878—bear the heading: "Notes for the Modern Tragedy." The opening sentences give a terse statement of the problem which Ibsen had set himself to treat in dramatic form. "There are two kinds of spiritual law," he begins, "two kinds of conscience, one in man and another, altogether different, in woman. They do not understand each other; but in practical life

the woman is judged by man's law, as though she were not a woman but a man.

"The wife in the play ends by having no idea of what is right or wrong; natural feeling on the one hand and belief in authority on the other have altogether bewildered her." And the concluding sentences—"The catastrophe approaches inexorably, inevitably. Despair, conflict and destruction"—justify the inference that Ibsen intended originally to terminate the play with the death of the woman.

Two speeches which Ibsen delivered before the Scandinavian Society in Rome on February 27th of the following year, show Ibsen espousing the cause of woman's rights in a distinctly practical way. The first was in defense of a motion to make women eligible for the post of librarian to the Society; the second was aimed at securing for women members the right of the vote. The text of the latter shows Ibsen wrought up to a high pitch of indignation over the men's reluctance to relinquish their ancient privilege. One phase of his argument deserves our particular attention. How is it, he asks, that in student societies the knottiest problems are solved without friction? "Because youth has the instinct, akin to genius, for intuitively hitting upon what is right. But it is this very instinct," he continues, "which woman has in common with youth as well as with the true artist." Nothing could show us more clearly than this, how completely Ibsen felt himself to be identified with the cause he was sponsoring. As in "Pillars of Society" he is again pleading the superiority of intuition over conventional logic and morality.

The first complete draft of "A Doll's House" was begun in Rome on May 2nd, 1879, and completed in Amalfi on August 3rd of the same year. By September 20th Ibsen had finished rewriting his play and put it into its final form. This

performance appears truly remarkable, as we come to realize how radically Ibsen recast his work in that space of a month and a half.

Confining myself, as I must, to pointing out briefly the most important modifications that occurred in the final revision, I will say at once that the original draft has none of the flavor of comedy about it. The main lines of the plot suffered no substantial alteration in the recasting; thus, except for a few outstanding condensations, the scene of the settlement is almost identical in both versions. On the other hand, the characters have been retouched to such a degree, that the Nora and Torvald who finally enact the settlement can no longer be identified with the husband and wife who are originally charged with the same dialogue. There is nothing comic about the Torvald of the draft. Thus, there is no hint of personal motives being at the bottom of his determination to dismiss Krogstad from his bank post. All of Torvald's heroic poses are missing: he neither talks of his shoulders being broad enough to bear the whole burden, in the second act, nor does he long, in Act III, for some danger to threaten Nora, so that he might risk everything for her sake; and after the arrival of Krogstad's second letter he compares her to a dove that has escaped unhurt from the claws of the hawk,[4] whereas our Torvald boasts of having *saved* her from those same claws.[5] The whole amorous scene of the third act is lacking in the draft: there has been no champagne and no tarantella to intoxicate Torvald—just a children's party, prolonged to the atrocious hour of midnight! It is also worth noting that Torvald's glad out-

[4] F. I. W., p. 164.

[5] In the same paragraph Torvald's original exclamation: "How could I find it in my heart . . ." was changed eventually to read: *"How could you think* I could find it in my heart to drive you away, or even so much as to reproach you?"

cry: "I am saved, Nora!" originally reads: "You are saved."

Now as to Nora, she has been retouched in a far more subtle and painstaking manner. The original Nora is designed without question to make us feel that underneath her playful and coquettish exterior she harbors an intense seriousness. She has been in the habit, for instance, of devoting a good deal of her time to copywork right along, and her doing so has been no secret to Torvald.[6] In contrast to *our* Nora, who is incapable of any continuity of purpose, her prototype has very definite ambitions. "This secret is my joy and pride," she tells Krogstad. "I have been looking forward so eagerly to getting it all paid off by saving and working, and one day telling my husband that it was I—" The Nora of the draft furthermore endures the agony of suspense for a full week. There can be no doubt of Ibsen's original intention to represent Nora as having been genuinely matured under the torture of anguish.

Even more important than these observations, however, are those traits of *our* Nora which the draft either fails to bring out at all or only very slightly. Thus the childlike limitation of the scope of Nora's sympathies to the members of her immediate family, her frank indifference to the rights of strangers, is emphasized only in the final version. Torvald's drastic illustration of the risk of incurring debt, because a roof-tile might hit him on the head before New Year's, causing his creditors to lose their money, and Nora's rejoinder: "They! Who cares for them? They're only strangers," are not to be found in the draft. Similarly, Nora's propensity for fibbing lacks its most telling illustration in the draft: there is no mention of the macaroons, and no mention, of course, of Nora's breaking her solemn prom-

[6] F. I. W., p. 98.

ise, in order to indulge her love of forbidden sweets. The draft, again, gives us scarcely a hint of Nora's supreme talent for play-acting, whereas the final text abounds in instances of her spontaneous artistry. Thus, in the original we do not find the pretty scene where Nora wheedles Torvald into giving her money for Christmas. In her account to Christina of the diplomacy she employed to make Torvald undertake the trip to Italy, the most characteristic phrases are missing, namely: "I wept and prayed; I said he ought to think of my condition, and not to thwart me." We search vainly in the draft for Nora's half-real and half-affected show of helplessness in the matter of selecting a costume. The original Nora displays not a touch of coquetry in her behavior toward Doctor Rank, who, by the way, owes all his ingratiating qualities to the final revision. And for all that scene where Nora so adroitly uses her "influence" on Christina's behalf, after having strutted about, openly displayed the contraband sweets and given vent to her irresistible impulse to be naughty, we fail to find any counterpart in the draft. Another highly important addition to Nora's portrait is her propensity for romancing and day-dreaming. The day-dream about the rich old adorer, who was to remember her so generously and so flatteringly in his will, is new. And new also—a most significant feature—is the concept of the miracle. I must qualify this statement by the admission that Nora does speak of the miracle at the end of the final scene,[7] but the term, and all it implies, evidently came to Ibsen as an afterthought. The Nora of the draft comes to the conclusion, in her second-act interview with Krogstad, that she must kill herself because otherwise Torvald would be at Krogstad's mercy.[8] And herewith we

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 173.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 144, and 150.

touch upon what is perhaps the most important alteration Nora underwent in the process of recasting: So far as I can discover, the fear of a domestic scene, while initially experienced by the Nora of the draft, is entirely subordinated as the action moves on, to moral qualms on the subject of her forgery; and her resolve to commit suicide is clinched by a genuinely altruistic desire to save Torvald from ruin; whereas our whole conception of the winsomely coquettish, play-acting and hysterical Nora of the finished play made us regard both her expectation of the miracle and her resolve to commit suicide as make-believes,—the products of an extravagantly generous imagination under the stimulus of fear.

Summing up, we find that the portrait of Nora, although still bearing a fair resemblance to her prototype, has in fact been worked over to such an extent that the cumulation of new touches has resulted in imparting a wholly novel expression to her features. It is clear that Ibsen originally conceived the situation under the tragic perspective; why, then, should his retouching of the characters have taken the form it did, had not Ibsen felt himself consciously rising to the higher perspective of comedy—drawn to it in spite of himself—as his intimacy with the Helmer household increased and he noted trait after trait, incident upon incident, which he had at first overlooked while preoccupied with the formulation of a theoretical problem?

To avoid misunderstandings it may be necessary to restate that Ibsen was an ardent champion of woman's rights before and after writing "A Doll's House." Apostle of freedom and individualism as he was, Ibsen felt that organized society was trying to keep woman in a state of virtual slavery. His indignation over this state of affairs fathered the plot of "A Doll's House" and his first concep-

tion of the characters. His uncompromising idealism originally inspired the scene of the settlement and dictated the rupture between husband and wife. It is equally necessary to remember, however, that Ibsen's idealism, active in the formulation of ethical demands, was balanced by just as radical a skepticism on the score of man's ability to meet the demands of the ideal, and this skepticism must be taken into account to understand the final form of "A Doll's House."

Nineteen years after writing "A Doll's House" Ibsen remarked in the course of an address: "I have been more of a poet and less of a social philosopher than people are generally inclined to believe." [9] With the single exception of "Pillars of Society" all the plays studied in this volume bear witness to the fact that Ibsen was fundamentally a poet. No matter what were the ideas which gave the initial impulse to Ibsen's creative imagination when he began work on a drama,—from the moment the characters began to live in the poet's mind they gradually emancipated themselves from the leading-strings of the idea; they grew and developed according to laws of their own; the poet assumed more and more the rôle of observer, listening to their heart-beats and recording their movements. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that they were as real to him, and as inviolable in their individuality, as though they were organisms under observation in the laboratory.

[9] May 26, 1898.

## III

## GHOSTS

The tragic sufferer in this terrible tragedy of fate is, of course, the Mother. For suffering to affect us as tragic, there must be a personality fine and firm and great enough to support a degree of affliction altogether beyond the range of the average mortal. The greater the sufferer's capacity for enduring anguish, the more profound are the possibilities of tragedy. The intensity of the tragic experience is in direct proportion to the nobility of aim, the firmness of will, the intellectual strength, the refinement and sensitiveness of the tragic sufferer.

In Mrs. Alving Ibsen has created a personality of exceedingly rare vigor and poise and sweetness of character. Her spiritual superiority makes itself felt from the moment of her first appearance. The tact and sensitiveness she displays in discussing with the Pastor the books that aroused his displeasure, and the question of whether or not to insure the orphanage, evoke our sympathetic admiration. Frank and courageous enough to state her own enlightened views in a perfectly straightforward way, she recognizes the futility of argument in the face of such set habits of thinking as the Pastor's; and her enduring fondness for the grave, childishly simple man she adored in her youth makes her meet his timidly expressed wishes with a generous measure of kindly, tolerant understanding, prompted by a desire to spare him embarrassment and to let no friction mar this

day, marking the consummation of her ambition. Graciously as she can yield on non-essentials, however, she is just as firm in permitting no meddling with her private affairs, as instanced by her refusal to consider the idea of returning Regina to her foster father. When her son enters, the sparkle in her eyes, as she lets them rest admiringly on his handsome figure, and her proud boast that he has kept both his outer and his inner man unharmed, reveal a mother's love intense and charged with a high idealism.

But if there is already something about the quality of her sensitiveness that makes us suspect it was not nurtured under smiling skies, her calm recital of the revolting martyrdom of her marriage creates a somber background, throwing into sharper relief the spiritual refinement of her features. Her vision, her courage, her serenity, and her sweetness impress us all the more profoundly, as we come to realize that they have been fostered under adversities such as would have coarsened or crushed a woman of a less heroic cast.

Gathering up the scattered fragments of dialogue that throw light upon Mrs. Alving's past, and joining them to her more connected revelations, we learn that the marriage between herself, the young girl reared in a severely puritanic atmosphere, and the wealthy and dissolute but exceedingly charming Captain Alving, had been arranged by her mother and her two aunts. It was not a love match; her heart had strayed elsewhere, to Pastor Manders; but so far as we can discern, the Pastor, although fond of her, made no move to win her hand, be it that his temperamental bashfulness, or a sense of loyalty to his friend Alving, or other motives, left for us to surmise, stood in the way of his courting her. The marriage turned out extremely unhappy; Alving did not relinquish his dissolute habits, and the young wife, outraged

in her morality and in her pride, finally could endure it no longer. About a year after their marriage, she fled from her husband to the house of the Pastor. There she broke down, confessed how utterly miserable she was, and her distracted behavior implied: "Here I am. Take me." The young clergyman, however, although aware of Alving's irregular life, lectured her severely on the rashness of her step, telling her with the authority of the official guardian of law and order that her rebelling was sinful, that a wife should not presume to judge her husband, and that God's will demanded she bear her cross in meekness and humility. He succeeded in patching up the marriage, and the Alvings left the city at once and moved to the Captain's country estate.

From this time forth no outsider got any glimpse of the real nature of their common life. In the third year of their marriage Oswald was born; when the boy was past six he was sent to a boarding-school. As for the Alving estate, its administration called forth a great deal of admiring comment. Modern machinery and scientific methods were introduced with such conspicuous success that for this pioneering service Alving earned the gratitude and esteem of his fellows. After nineteen years of married life Alving died, and under the management of his widow the estate continued to prosper.

Nobody knew that Alving had lived and died a reprobate; that he had even disgraced the home by a clandestine affair with his wife's chambermaid; that it was in reality his wife's energetic hand and intelligent brain which increased the productivity of the estate and filled the granaries and the stables, where his own sodden negligence would have ruined the property. And nobody suspected that his early death was brought on by a syphilitic infection contracted

many years ago—probably before his marriage—in the pursuit of his licentious pleasures. Even Mrs. Alving must have been ignorant of the nature of his disease until long after Oswald's birth, and even then she could have had no inkling of its possible consequences.[1]

The determination on Mrs. Alving's part to keep all these sinister facts hidden, and her success in accomplishing this object, reveal a degree of heroic pride and a strength of will which almost stagger belief. Her one impulsive appeal to the Pastor having opened her eyes to what to expect of the world if she made good her intention to revolt, she reversed her decision, and not being a person to put up with half-way measures, she made up her mind to endure anything, however revolting, to the end of keeping the name she bore —the family name—free from blemish. This abiding resolution gave her the courage to conquer her nausea even to the extent of making herself the boon companion of Alving in his nightly revels, for the purpose of keeping him at home. However, if we feel that this end did not warrant such a price, the same heroic strength of will also gave her the courage to shun no sacrifices on behalf of her child. No greater proof of the high-minded quality of her mother's love could be imagined, than her voluntary decision to en-

[1] She was informed of her husband's condition through the family doctor, who referred to Alving's dissolute life as criminally irresponsible (ryggesløs), a remark which, coming from a physician, can only refer to criminal negligence on Alving's part, in exposing his wife and offspring to danger of infection. How much the doctor told her, and when he told her, is nowhere clearly indicated,—probably she did not learn the truth until his disease had passed into its final stage. To be sure, she tells Oswald that his father was a broken-down man before he was born. It is psychologically inconceivable, however, that a woman of her character should have submitted to bearing a child, had she known what a heritage was likely to be its lot. The fate that overtakes her is the most drastic illustration of the consequences of society's policy to suppress the truth on behalf of the ideal, by conspiring to keep respectable women ignorant of the facts of sex.

dure separation from her boy rather than see him corrupted by his father's example. Already this act of renunciation involved an inner conflict deserving to be called tragic—or is it not tragic for a mother to give up an only child, of her own choice, in the full consciousness that she will thus be forever denied that intimacy with her offspring which can only flower in the atmosphere of the home? And we can surmise what fortitude it must have required, after Alving's death, for her to stick to her post and content herself with such infrequent visits as the course of Oswald's education permitted.

The practical energy she developed, after her discovery of Alving's relation with her chambermaid had given her the reins of control, adds another striking trait to her personality. Ten years after Alving's death her able administration had increased the resources of the estate to such an extent that she could afford to endow the orphanage with property and funds equal to the estate's original value.

And finally the review of that twenty-nine years' struggle, the silent and single-handed fight against overwhelming odds, reveals the liberation of her spirit from the shackles of conventional prejudice. Without a friend to turn to, she had begun to question an order of things which she had been taught to accept as divinely established and immutable. The humiliating failure of her attempt to throw off the yoke of marriage had kindled in her the spark of independent thinking. "It was then that I began to look into the seams of your doctrines," she tells the Pastor in language unforgettably vivid. "I wanted to pick only at a single knot; but when I had got that undone, the whole thing raveled out. And then I understood that it was all machine-sewn."

As yet her moral radicalism had remained a matter of the intellect alone. It had still to be put to the test of practice.

Her spiritual emancipation had been kept a strictly guarded secret, and she shrank from coming out into the open with it. Her frank defense to the Pastor of her reading is the first step she is taking in that direction. And, very significantly, she explains her reading on the ground that it makes her feel more secure. The consciousness of being in mental revolt against a view of life backed by the full authority of the church and the state, is exceedingly disquieting to her. She is not nearly so positive as she sounds, I daresay, about her assertion that those books contain nothing but what all the world is thinking in secret. She would like to reassure herself that such is the case; it is her will-to-believe that lends an emotional emphasis to her claim.

But there is more at the bottom of her timidity. The fact is that while she is intellectually emancipated, her feeling has not developed apace with her reasoning. She sees not only the concerted opinion of society arrayed against her; she has, besides, a more formidable foe to fight within her own self. In the second act, when she is already unnerved by Oswald's flirtation with Regina, she frankly confesses to the Pastor—what she had hitherto concealed under an air of perfect assurance—that she is fighting her battle with ghosts, both *within* and without. The ghosts within her are "the dead ideas, and lifeless old beliefs," of which she says: "They have no vitality, but they cling to us all the same, and we cannot shake them off." Even the first act, however, permits a glimpse of her struggle with the ghosts within her. After she has finished her recital of the hidden abyss marriage had been to her, the following dialogue takes place between her and the Pastor:

*Manders.* And it is to this man that you raise a memorial?
*Mrs. Alving.* There you see the power of an evil conscience.
*Manders.* Evil? What do you mean?

*Mrs. Alving.* It always seemed to me impossible but that the truth must come out and be believed. So the orphanage was to deaden all rumors and set every doubt at rest.

*Manders.* In that you have certainly not missed your aim, Mrs. Alving.

*Mrs. Alving.* And besides, I had one other reason. I was determined that Oswald, my own boy, should inherit nothing whatsoever from his father.

Clearly, the two reasons she adduces for having raised the memorial, fail to account adequately for her use of the expression which startled the Pastor,—"the power of an evil conscience." In reading this passage, one is apt to feel that either Ibsen or Mrs. Alving is guilty here of a strange looseness of expression; for, though the analogy is striking, there is an undeniable difference between a secret dread of ugly facts coming to light, and an evil conscience. The real significance of Mrs. Alving's remark is bound to remain cryptic until after the revelations of the second act. These words just slipped out of her mouth at a time when she was still trying hard to suppress all evidences of an inner conflict not yet fought to a finish. Her explanation is really nothing more than an evasion. This slip, however, furnishes us with a clue that leads to a very interesting discovery. Since she is obviously bent on suppressing one of the motives accounting for her erecting of the memorial, this must be the very motive to follow up! Taking her words as an involuntary confession, we perceive, then, that at the bottom of Mrs. Alving's act is a wholly irrational but none the less acutely real feeling of guilt,—an instinctive by-product, so to say, of her intellectual emancipation. Her decision to be her own judge of what is right and wrong marked so radical a revolt from the habits of a lifetime, so complete a breaking away from a training in a thousand precepts, all of them

designed to inculcate a respect for authority, that the dethroning of authority and the installation of the self in its place could not be effected without a feeling of guilt—a superstition (*superstitio*) clinging to her from the period of intellectual bondage. The raising of the memorial was prompted by an instinctive urge to offset this feeling of guilt by a signal act of reparation, analogous to a sacrifice offered up to propitiate an offended deity—and as irrational as a would-be atheist's sacrifice to the idol he has demolished. It is the most subtly ironical instance in the whole drama of the power of ghosts over the acts of the living.

I am not sure that Mrs. Alving herself was conscious at the time of the full meaning of her words. They sound rather like a revelation of her subconscious self. For, at the time when she uttered them, she was not acutely aware of the conflict within her. Her struggle with the ghosts of the past was in a state of quiescence. She thought the battle was terminated once for all, and she felt herself victor. In her first scene with the Pastor she talks with the air of one animated by a sense of triumph. It is as though she were looking back at the bitter conflict and the intolerable hardships of the last twenty-nine years from a lonely height, far above the battle. She is conscious of having reached the summit at last; she breathes its pure and invigorating air. The tranquil radiance of her soul is reflected in her countenance. Feeling secure at last, as her eye dwells on the completed memorial, the work of her hands, and on the image of her son, she experiences a serenity which leaves no room for any feeling of rancor.

It is just as though fate had been waiting for this moment to deliver its cruelest, deadliest blow. If the blind force that pursues Mrs. Alving had been a conscious demon, it could not have matured its designs with more systematic

cruelty. Like some grinning monster, some foul Caliban, it has been lurking in ambush for twenty-seven years, biding its time with a slow-witted brute's malignant patience, for its victim's spirit to reach the acme of its strength and refinement, in order then to vivisect it by a cumulation of diabolically graded tortures. The enactment of these tortures makes the drama of "Ghosts" unsurpassed in the world's literature for sheer tragic cruelty.

Already in the first act fate delivers two onslaughts against Mrs. Alving's serenity: the first, when Oswald walks in, his father's pipe in his mouth, and Manders is struck speechless by the young man's likeness to his father. Although this unnerves her for a moment, it remains for the second, Oswald's flirtation with Regina in the dining-room, to make the dread past rise up bodily before the Mother's vision.

In the second act, Mrs. Alving's consternation over the falling chair and Regina's sharp whisper is given time to take full effect before she is subjected to further shocks. Her illusion of tranquillity has been swept away. She is plunged back into the thick of her struggle with ghosts. The rift between the radicalism of her intellect and the conservatism of her emotions is exposed to the full view of herself and the Pastor. Her logic tells her that she should tell her boy the plain, unvarnished truth about his father's dissolute life, and that the fact of Oswald's being Regina's half brother should not be allowed to stand in the way of their marriage, if there were no grounds save the conventional taboo to be urged against their union. Her feeling, on the other hand, revolts against turning these theories into action. Weakened in her self-assurance, and humiliated in her pride, by this fresh outbreak of the conflict within her, she betrays her agitation by her restless movements, as she turns against herself in impotent anger, calling her-

self a coward again and again, with rising vehemence. How changed she appears from the calm woman she was an hour ago, when the smile in which aloofness blended with kindly tolerance never left her sensitive lips! Now that the ideal achievements of her struggle are jeopardized, a feeling of bitterness wells up within her against the fate that cheated her out of a wife's and a mother's happiness, and for a moment even the Pastor is made to feel the brunt of her hot resentment:

*Manders.* (Softly, with emotion.) And was that the upshot of my life's hardest battle?

*Mrs. Alving.* Call it rather your most pitiful defeat.

*Manders.* It was my greatest victory, Helen—the victory over myself.

*Mrs. Alving.* It was a crime against us both.

And a few moments later, after she has somewhat mastered her feelings, she catches herself making plans that again bring home to her how even her thinking instinctively turns back into grooves worn by the force of custom and tradition. The problem is how to get Regina out of the way. "Don't you think," Mrs. Alving says, "the best plan would be to get her provided for? I mean—by a good marriage." As she paused in her thought, there must have flitted across her mind an image of her aunts and her mother planning just such a "good marriage."

The next blow of fate descends on Mrs. Alving, when she is alone with her son, the Pastor having gone down to the orphanage to hold his prayer-meeting. To begin with, her already precarious self-control is put to further strain by the shocking thought that Oswald may have overheard her conversation with the Pastor; by his alarming indulgence in alcoholic stimulants; and by his erratic behavior, the

strange blending of apathy and tension in his manner. And then he breaks down and confides to her in uncontrolled accents the terrible calamity that has overtaken him: the fact that he is a wreck in body and spirit; that his career as an artist is at an end. Bit by bit he unfolds the tale of the first alarming symptoms; of his consultation with a high medical authority; of the physician's appalling verdict that there must have been something *vermoulu* about him from his birth. And as she rises and walks up and down in uncontrollable anguish, repeating the doctor's statement, "the sins of the fathers," he tells her how the authority of her own letters, in which she had cultivated the legend of Alving's moral excellence and practical energy, forced the doctor to change his diagnosis. And finally, in glaring contrast to his unquestionably sincere protestation, that he had never led a dissipated life in any respect, she must endure his turning against himself with morbid self-accusations, in the pathetic attempt to fasten upon himself a guilt despite his consciousness of innocence; she must hear him lament in hopeless despair: "If it had only been something inherited —something one wasn't responsible for!"

To the distracted Mother Oswald's confession is a terrible illustration of the power of ghosts, in the form of physical heredity; but even as drastically does it demonstrate to her the power of those more intangible ghosts that her emancipated brain has striven vainly to subdue. It is one of the cruel ironies of fate that the very problem she had been arguing with the Pastor as a question of principle, in a half-academic spirit, has suddenly become a horribly concrete issue, pressing for an immediate decision. Now or never is the time to tell her boy the shocking truth about his father's past. She has it in her power by a frank word to put an end to his morbid self-reproaches; she has been dismayed

to see that Oswald seems to doubt the intensity of her own motherly affection for him, in view of the fact that she apparently managed all these years to get along perfectly well without him; she must speak, finally, to check his passion for Regina. The logic of the situation fairly clamors for her to expose the pious fraud she has perpetrated. That she delays nevertheless, that she lets one opportunity after another slip by without mustering the courage to broach the dread subject, even though knowing that every moment of silence prolongs his agony, betrays the desperate character of the conflict raging within her breast. The claims of the ideal are irreconcilably pitted against the claims of truth. The contest is so close that Mrs. Alving is on the verge of collapse.

When the tension of the Mother's emotions has about reached the breaking point, Oswald drops a remark that has a sudden catalytic effect. His salvation lies in Regina, he tells his mother; for she is full of the joy of life. Mrs. Alving starts at the phrase. "The joy of life?" she repeats. "Can there be salvation in *that?*" she ponders. And as Oswald, in the presence of his mother and Regina, now develops what he means by the joy of life; as he contrasts the somber religion of the gloomy north with the light-hearted joyousness prevailing under sunnier skies; as he confesses that his own joyousness would degenerate into debauchery, if he were doomed to endure the gloom of his northern home very long,—Mrs. Alving experiences an upheaval that makes her see Alving and her relation to him in an entirely new light. "I see it now for the first time. And now I can speak," she says to Oswald. "Yes, I can speak and I will. And no ideals shall suffer after all," she tells the horrified Pastor, whose entrance interrupts her as she is on the point of speaking out. At that moment the orphanage bursts into

flames, as though fate had only awaited her resolution to tear down the elaborate fiction of which the orphanage was the symbol, in order to set the torch to the material achievement of her hands.

In Act III we see her carry out her resolution. It is shortly before dawn. The Captain Alving memorial is a heap of smoldering ruins. As though in diabolical mockery of her late designs, she has heard the Pastor agree to subsidize the sailors' dive that Engstrand proposes to grace with the name of Chamberlain Alving, with a portion of her endowment. Along with Oswald and Regina at last, she proceeds to liberate her boy of his burden of remorse, by an account which culminates in the statement: "Your father was a broken-down man before you were born." For the rest, there is not a word of reproach or bitterness in her veiled sketch of Alving's dissolute life. She apportions the blame for the turn his life took, between the half-grown town in which he was doomed to spend his days, the dull routine duties of his office, his dissolute companions, and herself. She would make Oswald regard his father's life as the necessary product of a conspiracy of circumstances.

Mrs. Alving fully believes that in disclosing to her son his father's past after this manner, she has contrived to reconcile the demands of truth with those of the ideal. But is she not grossly deceiving herself in this? Compare the version she gives Oswald with her statement to the Pastor in the second act: "If I were what I ought to be, I should go to Oswald and say, 'Listen, my boy: your father led a vicious life'—and then I should tell him all I have told you —every word of it." When put to the test, however, she found herself incapable of living up to her conviction. Her revulsion against uttering the horrible truth was insurmountable. She was straining every nerve in the effort to

find a formula that would soften the horror of the facts. That explains the force with which Oswald's remark about the joy of life struck home. In her eagerness to be persuaded, she accepts Oswald's version of the contrast between Norway and the rest of the world, at its face value, unwilling to perceive that it is her son's pathologically overwrought emotions and his despair over his doom that color the picture. There is, of course, a certain amount of truth in Oswald's claims; it is likewise true, no doubt, that the severity of her early ways was not calculated to win Alving. Yet there is a world of difference between admitting this, and picturing Alving, as she does, as a victim of circumstances. The fact that Mrs. Alving persuades herself that this is telling Oswald the truth about his father, shows plainly that her emotions, controlled by ghosts, have carried the day. To see her succumb, after so brave a struggle, to forces stronger than herself, renders her tragedy all the more poignant.

But to have routed her strong intelligence does not seem enough of a victory to the malice of fate: the sacrifice must also have been made in vain. It is reserved for the Mother to see that her account has wrought scarcely any impression on Oswald. So far as he was concerned, she might have told him the bald facts, and he would have responded with very much the same degree of apathy. "Of course it came upon me as a great surprise," he says in response to her attempt to console him; "but it can make no difference to me." "Ought not a son to love his father, whatever happens?" she asks in almost the very words the Pastor had employed against her. And as if to mock her in her defeat with the echoes of her own arguments, he retorts: "When a son has nothing to thank his father for? has never known him? Do you really cling to that old superstition?—you who are so enlightened in other ways?" Not enough, she has to learn

from his lips that he does not even respond to her own maternal devotion with any corresponding warmth. "You must remember that I am a sick man, mother. I can't be much taken up with other people; I have enough to do thinking about myself."

Even now the shafts of fate are not all spent. The most terrible trials are still in store for her. They seem the most terrible, at any rate, even if the edge of her sensitiveness to suffering must already be somewhat dulled by the unrelaxed strain. First, Oswald lifts the veil completely from the gruesome fate that awaits him—the doom of certain idiocy. Before she has time to recover from that shock, his agitation, rising to the verge of raving mania, wrings from her the promise to administer the fatal drug with her hands, when the need for it shall have arisen. And then, for just one brief moment, there is a deceptive lull, followed by a discovery so ghastly that it makes the blood congeal in her veins.

Will she, or will she not redeem her promise? The analogy of her previous conduct is all against it. She succumbed to the power of ghosts, when the logic of the facts clamored for the shattering of a "mere" ideal. Is it conceivable that her logic should triumph over her feeling, when called upon to destroy something incomparably more sacred to a mother —the life she conceived in her womb? Yet analogies are not final; anything is possible at the peak of such a cumulation of horrors—anything, that is, save an act of deliberate reasoning. And what does it really matter, whether she collapses in consequence of doing the deed or of her inability to see it through? Can either alternative deepen further her experience of tragedy or our tragic sympathy? As for making one's tragic sympathy contingent on whether or not she commits an act conventionally regarded as murder,—such considerations in the face of so elemental a tragedy seem

nothing short of grotesque. One would needs have to be a Pastor Manders not to feel intuitively that such an act, like suicide, is wholly beyond the pale of good and evil.

The title of "Ghosts" carries a double connotation. The acts of the dead cast their shadow over the living in the form of physical heredity; and ancient, outworn views and notions continue to spook in the feelings of the individual, long after their rational underpinning has fallen. In conformity with the title, it is a dual tragedy that we have seen enacted: an outward tragedy of fate, predetermined from the moment of Oswald's conception, completing its cycle in the space of twenty-seven years, testing the Mother's limits of endurance, as she is doomed to assist passively at the consummation of the catastrophe; and an inner tragedy of the will, a silent contest of opposing impulses within the Mother, a struggle in which the forces of the past, by their inert weight, score a grim victory over the heroic self that had all but won out in its battle for freedom. Of both these tragedies we witness only the final phase within the time limits of the drama. Both the stealthy march of fate up to the moment of the catastrophe, and Mrs. Alving's fight for emancipation to the point when she already smiled with a premature consciousness of triumph, are revealed in retrospect, in the most thoroughgoing application of the analytic method ever attempted by Ibsen.

The remaining characters range themselves into two groups. Pastor Manders and Oswald are of secondary importance as compared to Mrs. Alving, and Engstrand and Regina are again less prominent than the former pair. As to the latter of these groups, it is to be observed that the contacts of the carpenter and his step-daughter are chiefly with the secondary group, while the Pastor and Oswald act,

functionally speaking, as go-betweens, in so far as their relationships extend both upward, to Mrs. Alving, and downward to Engstrand and Regina.

Though a very simple character at bottom, Oswald runs danger of being seriously misunderstood at the first reading. A second reading is bound, however to correct misconceptions which are due to the fact that we are not fully initiated into Oswald's pathological condition until shortly before the breaking of the catastrophe. His behavior is determined by two sets of facts which should never be lost sight of: first, the physical degeneration of his brain tissues, as reflected in the fitful flare-up of his emotions, alternating with spells of morbid apathy, and also in the weakening of his intellectual powers; second, his consciousness of the inevitable doom that awaits him. The pathological instability of his emotions is too obvious to miss. Less easy to detect, on the other hand, is the fact that his intelligence has also suffered. It would seem that his hope of finding alleviation by resorting freely to alcoholic stimulants and by making up to Regina were already symptomatic of the weakening of his intelligence;—or should he have been wholly ignorant of the fact that alcoholic and sexual indulgence are the worst poisons for a man in his state? More clearly is his mental deterioration exposed in his account of how he forced the physician to change his diagnosis, by producing his mother's letters. And his morbid self-accusations despite his consciousness of having lived an absolutely celibate life presuppose a mind no longer capable of sound judgment. Again, his confidence in Regina's readiness to give him the poison is scarcely the calculation of a sane man. Regina would doubtless have contrived to disembarrass herself of his charge by means involving less risk to herself. I have already alluded, moreover, to the pathological exaggeration

that characterizes his sketch of the idyllic conditions supposed to prevail in the rest of the world as contrasted to the gloom of Norway, where neither joy nor beauty can thrive. Much of all this, no doubt, can be attributed to the fact that Oswald is very simple and unsophisticated. His own innocence, and the naïve ardor with which he champions the morality of his fellow-artists show very clearly that he has been seeing the world with the trusting eyes of a child. Yet I do not think that this alone is sufficient in itself to account for his behavior.

After the veil has been lifted from the ghastly doom of which Oswald knows himself to be the innocent victim, his excessive indulgence in drink, and the frank expression of his physical hunger for Regina make him all the more pathetic an object of our pity. We no longer think of judging him as a normal man. There is enough of his original self left, moreover, to make us perceive what a sweet-tempered and sensitive youth he must have been. Whenever Oswald is with his mother, one cannot help feeling an undertone of exquisite tenderness in the way he addresses her. His realization of his growing apathy makes his attempts to caress and fondle her by the tone of his words all the more heart-rending. Perhaps nothing reveals his sensitiveness so touchingly as his behavior in the second act, just before he breaks the terrible news to his mother. Mrs. Alving finds him alone in the dining-room, drinking and smoking. She invites him to join her in the sitting-room, but he is reluctant to leave his cigar. The peculiar intonation of her voice that morning, when she asked him to put away his father's pipe, had not escaped him. When she reassures him, therefore, that she does not mind his cigar in the least, he brings it with him, but he keeps holding it behind his back while he talks, until the craving gets too strong for him.

The case of Oswald has called forth a good deal of discussion in medical circles. While the variety of opinions—favorable and unfavorable—expressed with regard to Ibsen's presentation of Oswald's symptom-complex and his collapse, are exceedingly interesting, I think it better for the lay critic to avoid so technical a subject. An ingenious interpretation, however, that has been advanced with regard to Oswald's final words: "Mother, give me the sun," deserves a word of comment. It has been suggested that in all probability Oswald suffers a right-sided stroke, as, sitting with his back to the windows, he seems to crumple in his chair. He is still sufficiently conscious to realize what is happening to him. He knows that the dreaded moment has arrived; so he attempts to say: "Mother, give me the tablets." But the speech centers of his brain have been affected by the stroke, and, unable to find the right word, he keeps repeating, "the sun—the sun," meaning all the time, the tablets. This theory, according to which Oswald merely suffers a stroke accompanied by paraphasia, instead of lapsing at once into complete idiocy, seems to be supported by medical experience in analogous cases.[2] But I cannot believe that Ibsen could have had such a thing in mind in writing these words. Even if he had been aware that Oswald's collapse warranted such a construction, which I doubt, Ibsen must have realized the utter impossibility of conveying it to the general reader, or to any lay audience.—

In sharp—almost offensively sharp—contrast to the heroic mother and her stricken child stands Pastor Manders. If love depended upon rational factors, it were difficult to understand how a woman of Mrs. Alving's personality could ever have felt herself drawn to so weak and colorless a man.

[2] O. Aronsohn: "Oswald Alving," pp. 19-20. Carl Marhold, Halle, 1909.

He has changed, of course, in the twenty-eight years that have elapsed since that memorable day, when his words decided her fate; he has become set and fixed, that is, in habits of conduct which, functioning now with the smoothness of an automatic mechanism, must have involved in his earlier days a certain amount of friction between impulse and training. But he is essentially right, I think, in his claim: "I am what I always was." We observe, moreover, that there is even now something irresistibly appealing to Mrs. Alving in his utter inability to judge human motives, which shows that her strong mother impulse must have been the dominating factor in that strange attraction. "I think you are, and always will be, a great baby, Manders," she says, after having just seen Engstrand pull the wool over his eyes. And, laying her hands upon his shoulders, she continues in accents expressive of a great tenderness, even though mingled with raillery and disappointment: "And I say that I have half a mind to put my arms around your neck and kiss you."

Manders is easily recognized as a spiritual cousin of the young divine who was the official guardian of the proprieties in Consul Bernick's circle. Both are equally lacking in intellectual honesty, in sympathetic insight, and in real leadership. Both cater—the one in a more servile, the other in a more timid way—to the opinions of the wealthy and influential, the "really responsible people," according to Manders' definition. In Manders' case, however, these tendencies are accentuated by a temperamental passivity that colors all his reactions. He has never experienced the grip of any real passion for good or for evil. His sex life has never developed beyond a furtive curiosity, and he has repressed it rather successfully by the tactics of the ostrich. He has a certain smugness of manner, without it being aggressive enough to turn into arrogance. His instincts are those of

the herd. He shrinks in craven cowardice from any assertion of personality that would provoke a conflict which might endanger his prestige with the group. The best to be said for him is that he is a well-meaning nonentity, harmless in himself, a useful person in a minor administrative capacity.

In a letter to Georg Brandes, dated January 3, 1882, Ibsen comments on the intellectual characteristics of the clergy in a vein showing to what an extent he conceived Manders to be typically representative of the class. "That enfeeblement of the judgment," he writes, "which, at least in the case of the average man, is an inevitable consequence of protracted occupation with theological studies, betrays itself more especially in the judging of human character, human actions, and human motives. Practical business judgment, on the other hand, does not suffer so much from the study in question. Hence," he adds, "the reverend gentlemen are very often excellent members of local boards; but they are, unquestionably, our worst critics." A second passage, from a letter to Frederic Hegel, published in extract in the German edition,[3] and dated October 25, 1880, during the period, that is, when the characters of "Ghosts" began to take shape in Ibsen's mind, is even more spicy: "Der schwarzen Theologenbande, die gegenwärtig im norwegischen Kultusministerium das Regiment führt, werde ich bei Gelegenheit ein angemessenes literarisches Denkmal setzen." Ibsen did not entirely escape the danger of being carried a bit too far by his satirical animus. I think William Archer is right in characterizing as a blemish, impairing

[3] In the explanatory notes to Ibsen's letter to Hegel of October 25, 1880. Except for the bulk of the explanatory notes the American edition (Fox Duffield) reproduces all the material of the German, even including the scholarly editors' introduction, for which, however, it fails to give credit.

somewhat the artistic faultlessness of the play, the inconceivable facility with which, in the third act, Manders suffers himself to be victimized by Engstrand.[4]

As to the hobbling carpenter, I cannot overcome the feeling that he does not fit into the severely realistic atmosphere of this drama. He is conceived too much along the conventional lines of the comic stage hypocrite to give us the illusion of his being a real person, particularly when we see him moving in the presence of so vividly real a character as Mrs. Alving. His awkward lapses from his rôle are more ludicrous than convincing. His language is full of equivocal turns that suggest a bit of satirical by-play on the author's part rather than innocent blundering. Altogether he wears his mantle of hypocrisy too loosely; he is too frequently in negligé, so to speak, for us not to feel that he has been rather deliberately overdone in order to set the Pastor's gullibility into sharper relief. By way of contrast, Regina is one of the most strikingly realistic figures that have issued from Ibsen's brain. Her coarse, materialistic instincts, her calculating shrewdness, tempered, however, by a hunger for romance, combine with her temperamental vigor and splendid physique to impress her image indelibly upon the imagination.

That "Ghosts" constituted a challenge to the conservative forces of organized society, Ibsen fully knew. "It may well be that the play is in several respects rather daring," he wrote to a Danish newspaper editor about a month after its appearance, adding: "But it seemed to me that the time had come when some boundary-posts required to be moved." [5] It took an act of courage to build a drama around

[4] Intr. to Scribner's Copyright Edition, Vol. VII, p. xxvi.
[5] To Otto Borchsenius, January 28, 1882.

a situation, the very mention of which outraged the sensibilities of a prudish generation. Even more offensive than the subject, if possible, was the implication that an attack was being launched against the very foundations of law and order. And who that knows Ibsen's spiritual temper would deny that Mrs. Alving's courageous attempt to free herself from the shackles of traditional standards of right and wrong, to examine on its own merits every element of the fabric of conventional morality, had Ibsen's fullest sympathy?

That a great outcry should be raised, therefore, against this drama, by the standard-bearers of conservatism, notably the clergy, was a foregone conclusion, and caused no surprise to Ibsen. It was quite another matter, however, to deduce from the drama Ibsen's views on specific questions, and to charge him, for instance, with favoring brother and sister marriages and advocating the elimination of the unfit. It was in answer to misrepresentations of this character that he wrote to Sophus Schandorph, on January 6, 1882: "They endeavor to make me responsible for the opinions which certain of the personages of my drama express. And yet there is not in the whole book a single opinion, a single utterance, which can be laid to the account of the author. I took good care to avoid this. The method, the technique of the construction in itself entirely precludes the author's appearing in the speeches. My intention was to produce the impression in the mind of the reader that he was witnessing something real. Now, nothing would more effectually prevent such an impression than the insertion of the author's private opinions in the dialogue. Do they imagine at home that I have not enough of the dramatic instinct to be aware of this? Of course I am aware of it, and act accordingly. And in no other play which I have written is the author such an outsider, so entirely absent, as in this last one.

"Then they say that the book preaches nihilism. It does not. It preaches nothing at all. It merely points out that there is a ferment of nihilism under the surface, at home as elsewhere. And this is inevitable. A Pastor Manders will always rouse some Mrs. Alving to revolt. And just because she is a woman, she will, once she has begun, go to great extremes."

Is this self-defense of Ibsen's quite ingenuous? It is his reaction against wilful misrepresentation; but he certainly overstates the case in asserting that in no other play of his is the author such an outsider, so entirely absent as in this one. While it may be correct literally, as regards the speeches of his characters, it is equally true that his personality is distinctly in evidence throughout the play. I have already spoken of Ibsen's personal animus against the clergy coming to the fore in the portrait of Pastor Manders. And I must call attention to two other cases which illustrate most interestingly, as I see it, the blending of truth and sophistry in Ibsen's contention. Both of them refer to Oswald. In the first act he scathingly exposes the hypocrisy of the philistine who goes to Paris to enjoy a moral holiday, and returns home with lurid accounts of the immoral conditions prevailing in foreign parts. True, it is Oswald speaking, not Ibsen; but is there a reader who does not instinctively feel that it is Ibsen's vitriolic temperament rather than Oswald's naïve innocence which phrased this attack? The second case is Oswald's pathological lament, in the third act, over the interminable gloom of the northern skies. He cannot remember ever having seen the sun shine at home, and he feels that in this atmosphere all innocent joy of life, and all beauty, must become perverted into debauchery and ugliness. This case is somewhat involved, psychologically. Oswald's remarks are fully motivated by his despair. None

but an unbalanced man would go to such extremes, and Ibsen knew this perfectly well. But at the same time we have reason to infer from countless other confessions of Ibsen's, that his own feelings with regard to Norway were scarcely a shade less extreme than those he attributes to Oswald. In this case, Ibsen was aware of voicing his own feelings, and aware, at the same time, that he could give utterance to what he himself felt to be a pathological irritation, only under the cover of a pathological character like Oswald's.[6]

Shortly after its appearance Georg Brandes pronounced "Ghosts" Ibsen's noblest deed, if not his greatest play. A good many years later Björnson, influenced possibly by the fact that he was the first of Ibsen's countrymen to come to the poet's defense, when a tempest of abuse was showered upon him from all quarters, unhesitatingly called "Ghosts" Ibsen's greatest work. William Archer, I think, shows a truer perception in stating: "We can scarcely call 'Ghosts' Ibsen's richest or most human play, and certainly not his profoundest or most poetical. . . . It is, in my judgment, a little bare, hard, austere." From a historical point of view, however, it occupies a position of peculiar importance. When the movement of naturalism, in Germany, made its first assault upon the stage, in 1889, "Ghosts" was a symbol to which the young spirits rallied. *Die Freie Bühne* produced "Ghosts" at its memorable opening performance, and eye-witnesses tell of the picturesque figure of Hoffory, the Danish critic, striding down the aisles, between the acts, and announcing in the voice of prophecy: "This day marks the beginning of a new literary era."

[6] A reference in the draft of "A Doll's House" to "the cursed cold, damp north" was suppressed in the final version. I touch upon this again in discussing "The Master-Builder" and "When We Dead Awaken."

## IV

## AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

The publication of "Ghosts" was followed by a storm of abusive criticism, the like of which Ibsen had never experienced before. So general was the tone of violent condemnation—no less in the Liberal than in the Conservative political camp—that even Frederic Hegel, whose generous policy as publisher of Ibsen's works had made for very cordial relations between them, felt called upon to utter a word of warning to the poet not to overstep the bounds of moderation. Ibsen's reply gave him to understand politely, but none the less firmly, that these were matters which exclusively concerned his own judgment.[1] Numerous references to the reception of "Ghosts" in Ibsen's letters of this period show how deeply it affected him, despite his attempts to take the matter in a calm and unruffled way, as something entirely to be expected. These references show how much he had grown in the matter of self-control since the days of "Peer Gynt," when he had felt ready to "club the life out of" an influential reviewer who had disparaged its poetic value. He could afford now to be calm, at least outwardly, for he was confident that the future was on his side.[2]

Yet he would not have been Ibsen, had he not boiled inwardly with rage over the stupidity and the hypocritical cant of his detractors. But fortunately rage subsided into derisive humor; and in that frame of mind he conceived and wrote

[1] Letter of March 16, 1882.
[2] Letter to Hegel, March 16, 1882.

his ringing dramatic defense, "An Enemy of the People." For once, as is significant to note, he did not require the long period of incubation, characteristic of all the other productions of his maturity; the new play appeared in the fall of 1882, only a year after the publication of "Ghosts." He could afford to forego it this time, since his breezy conception of the new subject from the comic angle allowed him to dispense on this occasion with the slow "laboratory work" of intimate psychological analysis.

Much has been written about whom Ibsen may have used as the model for Doctor Thomas Stockmann. The honor has been claimed for Björnson, Jonas Lie, Georg Brandes and more lately for a rather boisterous Christiania reformer, Harald Thaulow, who, among other things, wrote a pamphlet for which he borrowed from Ibsen the title of "Pillars of Society." Except so far as the sanguine Doctor's temperament is concerned, the discussion is idle; for the Doctor's ideas about society, as well as the vehement and paradoxical form of their utterance, are Ibsen's own; some of Doctor Stockmann's programmatic ideas are stoutly championed by Ibsen in his letters as far back as a decade before the play was written. It is clear, moreover, that in this case the ideas supplied the prime motive for writing the play. Ibsen was fairly aching to tell the world, and his Norwegian countrymen more specifically, what he thought of their governing classes, their political party life, their press, the catch words of the multitude and the march of progress in general. In Act IV, the brilliant climax of the play, he has his say out, shouting his convictions with the Doctor's voice above the din and the cat-calls of the mob; and in Act V he gets his vicarious revenge on the press by having the irate hero brandish his umbrella aloft and put the rascals to flight.

From the point of view of stage mechanics, "An Enemy

of the People" has no counterpart in Ibsen's works for lucid structure and drastic, swiftly moving action. By the first meeting of the two radically dissimilar and temperamentally antipathetic Stockmann brothers, the contrast that forms the basis of the dramatic conflict is sketched in bold relief, and our sympathies are manipulated with a deft hand that steers them in a predetermined path without friction or jostling. We witness the first preliminary tiff which is bound to be followed by a more serious clash. There is nothing for us to unlearn in the succeeding acts: no revelations are sprung in Ibsen's wonted fashion; the focus of our sympathies requires no readjusting. Thus the technique of retrospective analysis, by means of which Ibsen achieved both a complexity and an objectivity of character portrayal heretofore unknown in dramatic literature, is abandoned for once in favor of a directness and simplicity calculated to enlist our sympathies immediately and whole-heartedly on the side of the burly, obstreperous, artless and genial Doctor. A check is put on objective critical analysis; when we do not laugh *with* the Doctor because of the consternation he causes in the camp of his enemies, we laugh *at* his comic impetuousness and lack of sophistication; he endears himself irresistibly to us by the gratification he affords our sense of the comic; the essential attitude of comedy is sustained; the Doctor's sanguine temperament keeps us on the run, as it were, affording us no opportunity for critical detachment.

With a series of deft, sure strokes the first act outlines the situation and prepares for the conflict. In the course of the act all the characters, except Aslaksen and the "Badger," are introduced and tersely characterized. The economic and political situation of the little seaside resort is lucidly sketched,—the new era of prosperity, due to the Baths; the political truce between the Conservative and the Liberal

faction, on economic grounds; the impending local elections, promising this time to be a tame affair; and withal the clearly discernible undercurrent of political and personal friction. The action is launched by the arrival of the letter confirming the Doctor's suspicion about the pollution of the Baths, and by the two consequential steps with which he follows up his discovery: the report, prepared in advance, is dispatched by a special messenger to the Burgomaster, and the news of the discovery is gleefully proclaimed to the convivial gathering in the Doctor's home. More sophisticated than the happy Doctor, we look forward to the breaking of the tempest.

Act II precipitates the conflict in earnest. The Doctor finds his cause espoused by the representatives of the Liberal press and of the compact majority of tax-payers. Tingling with elation because of this unsolicited support and still without guile, he receives his brother in the expectation of a grudgingly bestowed tribute of gratitude, only to be rudely jolted out of his bliss by the manner in which the latter has reacted to his discovery. Instead of being hailed as a public benefactor, he must hear himself scolded, abused, threatened and called an impossible person. His discovery is to be suppressed, and he is called upon to make good the mischief already wrought, by a public retraction of his statements. The Doctor comes to, out of his rosy dreams, under this rude attack. One illusion is definitely gone. If there is going to be a struggle, he is ready for a fight that will make the town ring.

Two more developments of importance occur in Act II besides the precipitating of the conflict. The attitude of Stockmann's father-in-law, Morten Kiil, gives us an idea of what a malicious interpretation will be put upon the Doctor's fight against his brother by one element of the popula-

tion. The Morten Kiils—and there are many of them in every community—will not regard him as a disinterested benefactor. More important, however, is Hovstad's announced intention to make political capital out of the Doctor's find. With the publicist's eye for catchwords, he sees that the foulness bred by the stagnant waters of the swamp, symbolically interpreted, can be used with telling effect against the political stagnationists—the Conservative party; and with the local elections at hand, the time is most opportune for calling the political truce. Stockmann is taken aback at first by this unexpected turn; but it is sufficient for the canny journalist to play upon his artless zeal for enlightenment, by presenting the campaign as a crusade against "superstition," to win his conditional consent. And when he finds himself checked by his brother, a little later, this catchword of Hovstad's provides the spark that sets off the train of his own political and social fireworks.

Act III brings the turning-point. Intoxicated with a sense of power by the consciousness of having the Liberal press before him and the compact majority at his back, the Doctor sees red. He now has his mind set on nothing less than a thorough-going political revolution at home. He already sees the Burgomaster dethroned and himself in his place. But the collapse of his dreams comes with amazing swiftness. At the moment when the Doctor feels himself borne aloft on the crest of his enthusiasm, when he struts about in the office of the *Messenger,* parading the insignia of local authority before his brother's livid face, his allies desert him: A word of flattery on the part of the Burgomaster has clinched the defection of the wobbly Aslaksen; and Hovstad, bound to follow suit because he is financially at Aslaksen's mercy, moreover has a personal score to settle with the father of Petra. The suddenness of this change of fortune dazes the

Doctor like a thunderclap, but only for a moment; then he realizes that this thunderclap has cleared the air to his advantage; it has swept away the cobwebs of illusion which distorted his vision and his thoughts. Far from his being defeated, the fight has just begun. Now for the first time he feels invincible in the face of the decisive contest impending.

In Act IV the Doctor stages his spirited come-back. Undaunted by the conspiracy of the press and the town to muzzle him, he has passed around the word that he would deliver a lecture; and curiosity has brought a representative crowd to the spacious dining-room of the old mansion which Captain Horster has put at his disposal. So far he has won; but he has failed to reckon with the concerted shrewdness of his opponents; for besides having prepared the ground by a campaign of whispers, they have had the boldness to appear in person. As the Doctor steps out upon the lecture platform, they play their trump card by insisting upon the election of a chairman, and this is followed by a resolution to deny him permission to read his lecture. He is outmaneuvered and beaten again, more decisively than the first time; so it seems. Then it is that a sort of Berserker wrath descends upon him, not unlike in effect to a divine inspiration,—a contingency with which his opponents had been unable to reckon beforehand. Having once gotten under way, nothing can check him before he has delivered himself of his indignation and of all the new ideas which have accumulated in his brain in the course of the last two days. Hissed, and finally mishandled by the mob, he none the less emerges as victor. He has achieved his purpose. He has had his say.

The last act presents a final series of concerted countermoves on the part of society to dislodge the Doctor from his position of victory in isolation. The broken glass and the

rocks on the floor are simply the prelude to a thoroughgoing boycott of the Doctor, his family and their single friend. In addition, threats of moral blackmail and temptations to sell himself for a price drive in upon him from three different quarters. The Burgomaster threatens him with complete ostracism, but holds out the hope of eventual reinstatement—at a price. As the Doctor refuses to budge, his brother is overjoyed to find a lever against him in the admission that old Morten Kiil is taking delight in the rumpus. It will now be easy to represent his conduct in such a light as to indicate an existing deal between the Doctor and his rich old father-in-law, who has old scores to settle with the Baths Committee; hence further conciliatory moves are no longer dictated by prudence. The second attack upon his honesty is staged by old Morten Kiil himself. This time he is less shocked by the insinuations involved in the proposed deal—it was the sort of thing to expect from the canny old "Badger"—but he feels the turn of the screws in his flesh most painfully; for it is now no longer a question primarily of himself: By persisting in his course he will be robbing his wife of her paternal inheritance. The third attack on his integrity is delivered by his former allies, Hovstad and Aslaksen. Crediting him with a shrewdness and hypocrisy which staggers his imagination, they open his eyes to the opportunity of amassing wealth at a single stroke by artificially depressing the value of the stock of the Baths. To clinch the speculation safely, the spokesman of the press and the leader of the compact majority offer to put their forces at his disposal, in return for their getting a share in the deal. Thus the three attacks involve, objectively considered, a dynamic increase in the magnitude of the temptation: The Burgomaster offered eventual reinstatement; Morten Kiil held out financial security; Hovstad and Aslak-

sen put him within reach of wealth and power. The third temptation, by the utter depravity of its proponents and by their imputation of an equal depravity on the Doctor's part, neutralizes the earlier temptation, which he had felt as painfully real, and brings about the utter moral and physical rout of the whole rotten gang. This victory is decisive. The authorities, the press, the respectable middle class and the rabble have spent the shafts of their attacks. They have not succeeded in making the Doctor budge one inch from his position. He stands there, erect, a living proof of the final truth he has discovered: "The strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone."

In its lucid grouping of the forces, its brisk movement, the head-on clash of opposites, the rapid marshaling of moves and countermoves, the graphic presentation of the turning-point, the vigor of the dynamic climax and the drastic conclusion, the play resembles the staging of a spirited sham battle. "An Enemy of the People" is without question a brilliant feat of stage mechanics. Over against this fact, the looseness in this play of Ibsen's usually puncture-proof motivation scarcely cuts any figure. Stockmann's artless expectation to find the Burgomaster peeved over his discovery, because it will dim his own reputation of being the most deserving citizen of the town; his wife's concurring in this sentiment; her comic dread of that fearsome thing, the compact majority—these would strain plausibility to the breaking point, if we did not react to them in the spirit of a game. Similarly, we have not the critical patience to ponder over Hovstad's alarming shortsightedness in espousing a cause that is bound to be unpopular. And as for Aslaksen coming to offer the Doctor his unsolicited support—supposing we already knew this man for the cautious political

pussy-footer that he is; supposing we remembered the Doctor's reputation for "fads and crack-brained notions"—how could we possibly reconcile the constitutional wariness of this apostle of moderation with the blundering rashness of such a step? The fact is, the absence of scrupulous care in the realistic treatment of detail does not impinge upon our consciousness, because there are no eddies in the impetuous rush of the current of action, to give us pause.

We lay the play aside, tingling with elation over the Doctor's victory. Ibsen has made certain of that, by marshaling nothing but crooks and fools on the side of the opposition. There is the anæmic Burgomaster, a stickler for form, a sour-faced kill-joy, petty in his transparent egotism, petrified in his sense of authority, craftily hypocritical in his guardianship of the public weal; the two shabby journalists, opportunists and rascals of the coarsest texture, loud-mouthed and dirtily treacherous; the respectable, whining, sanctimonious preacher of moderate discretion; the filthy old tanner, bestially ignorant like the peasant of Holberg's day, stingy, and cruel, and shrewd withal; and behind these, the mass of burghers, colorless and timid, cowardly like a herd of sheep, coarse in their brutality, and yet restrained by the cowing discipline of many generations. Not a one among them whom we do not heartily despise for his meanness. Against this background of sordidness the figure of the Doctor is bound to stand out in boldest relief. His brusque, unsophisticated geniality takes our hearts by storm. His temperamental enthusiasm is catching. His very simplicity is so lovable that from our superior vantage-point we applaud him and egg him on, like an impish child exposing the make-believes of convention. After witnessing his naïve delight in the juicy roast of beef and in his other newly acquired luxuries—the tablecloth, and the lamp-shade which

really diffuses the light quite artistically—we could never be angry at him,—or take him quite seriously. No matter what unpleasant things he may say, we will never construe them as aimed at ourselves, since we feel so superior to him, intrenched as we are in the refinements of our civilization. We are grateful to him for making us laugh. We would forgive anything he did for the sake of such a choice remark as: "A man should never put on his best trousers when he goes out to battle for truth and freedom." But what stampedes the play-goer's sympathy even more than the Doctor's geniality, enthusiasm, and naïveté, is his indomitable fighting spirit. His conviction of righteousness is backed by the most tenacious pugnacity. He is blindly courageous. His fighting spirit once aroused, he is ready to charge a whole army single-handed. Now the average red-blooded man likes to see nothing so much as a good fight. He will always cheer the fighter who, though outnumbered, refuses to budge. And the greater the odds against the staunch, single-handed champion, the greater the number of cowardly toughs and bullies who fall upon him, the more wildly the spectator will cheer when the whole mob of them is eventually routed by the courage of the lone individual who cannot be beaten, because—as we say—he never knows when he is licked. Stockmann scores two such brilliant victories: the first, when he upsets the crafty plans of his opponents by his impromptu broadside, when he fills their ranks with consternation by having his say out; the second, when he puts Hovstad and Aslaksen to flight by the flourish of his umbrella. Without any doubt, it is the fighting qualities of the doughty Doctor, above all, which have made him a stage idol.

So much for the personal aspects of the Doctor's victory. At the same time, however, we see the struggle between the

Doctor and the town from a larger perspective. A public-spirited citizen has made a discovery of vital importance to the whole town. The authorities enter into a conspiracy with the press and the leaders of the opposition to suppress the inconvenient discovery by all the tricks and stratagems at their disposal. By his fight to make himself heard, the Doctor automatically becomes the champion of truth versus lie, of right against might. That is the only issue we see or care about, once we are under the spell of the play's suggestion; and at the conclusion we tingle with satisfaction over the vindication of truth and the exposure of falsehood. We feel we have been assisting at a contest between God and the Devil, and that God won. We are intuitively aware, in fact, that the whole play is focussed upon this issue.

Is this issue justified by the situation? The very question may be startling to the reader,—so securely have we been enmeshed by the net of suggestion spread to capture our sympathies for the genial Doctor; so willingly have we yielded to the author's adroit manipulation of our feelings. However, once the above analysis of the basis of our sympathies has made it apparent that our critical reason was shunted off to a siding from the very outset, in order to clear the track for the fast express of our emotions,—then our exultation in the triumph of truth over lie, in the victory of God and the disgraceful rout of the Devil will appear premature. Our reason will clamor for a review of the situation, before our zealous moral approval becomes final.

In all fairness we must put the Doctor's righteous cause on the defensive and examine its claims reasonably, critically. We must stop our ears against the persuasive eloquence of the advocate. We must even spice our objectivity with a pinch of skepticism.

Let our critical gaze dwell for a moment on the Doctor, as he flourishes the fateful letter. After creating an atmosphere of breathless tension by his rhetorical questions punctuated by effective pauses, he announces his discovery with a burst of emphasis that carries a shock like the sudden release of a high-voltage current. His body can scarcely stand up under the exuberance of pride and joy with which his discovery fills him. His outward personal modesty merely accentuates the importance of his find. "He has only been doing his duty. He has been a lucky treasure-digger." Now, what is it, precisely, that he is overjoyed about? The fact, he would say, that a very significant truth has been brought to light. Of course, we find this unspeakably amusing. He is gratified, in reality, at this new proof of his cleverness, of his superior insight and at the opportunity it affords him to bring this fact home in a most humiliating manner to the Board of Directors. Why had he carried on his investigations in absolute secrecy? Not from any sense of discretion—subsequent acts of his show that there is no trace of this in his make-up—but plainly, in order to spring a dramatic surprise upon his hectoring brother. A very human way to feel, surely, and justified in part by the snobbery and stupidity of the authorities. This much should be clear, however, from the outset: The Doctor is animated by temperamental pugnacity, a fairly active feeling of personal jealousy and an extremely good opinion of himself. He fools himself right along by persuading himself that his conduct is dictated by an abstract love of truth. Now, to begin with, we are perfectly aware of the human-all-too-human animus of his conduct. However, as the play progresses and the issue becomes defined, the Doctor imperceptibly glides into the position of a champion of righteousness against lying hypocrisy. . . . Glides into this position,

I said. Is jockeyed into this position—formulates the fact more precisely.

Having dispatched his report to the Burgomaster and broadcast the news among his friends, the Doctor struts about in a state of bliss, ready to see things take their course. By his lack of discretion he has already prejudiced the success of his reform immeasurably. His report is couched in such language that his brother, who was primarily responsible for the initial blunder in laying the pipes, is bound to see in it the ax that threatens to cut off his political career. To be sure, we do not see the report, but we hear Billing's comment: "Strong! Why, strike me dead if it isn't crushing! Every word falls like a—well, like a sledge-hammer." So, if our sympathies had not been set against the Burgomaster from the outset, and if he did not continue to parade the stupidity of the ossified bureaucrat, we could not blame him overmuch for refusing to accept his brother's verdict without a struggle. Or is the Burgomaster not right in remarking during his interview with the Doctor the next day that the matter in question is not a purely scientific one; that it has both a technical and an economic side? And is he not right in insisting that the matter be taken under calm deliberation with a view to finding less costly remedies than the one dictated by the Doctor to the Board? But even more serious than the dispatching of his provocatively phrased report is the ill-timed publicity which the Doctor has given the matter. This action of his, by the way, is rooted in one of his fundamental maxims, linked up, significantly, with the concept of duty: "It is a citizen's duty, when he has conceived a new idea, to communicate it to the public!" Now it is only a question of days before the whole town, and then the surrounding communities, will get wind of the affair, and it requires very

little imagination to picture how they will exploit the rumor to their own advantage and to the ruin of the discredited rival resort.

The Doctor does not look at his actions from this angle; in fact, he is prevented from following out their probable consequences and from feeling any regret at the threatening economic calamity by the soothing consciousness of having done his duty. Duty is the lodestar to which he hitches his wagon, and at which he gazes both before and after his fight. . . . A lodestar? In reality a will-o'-the-wisp that keeps dancing in front of the reckless driver instead of guiding his course; a word fetish that harbors a double danger: serving by its absoluteness both as a blinder against any possible enlargement of his vision and as a feed-supply, turning the whole volume of his energy into a single channel. This consciousness of having done nothing but his duty is precisely the most dangerous feature to society of the Doctor's mental make-up, for it allows him to wash his hands completely of the consequences of his discovery. It dispenses him from any responsibility to see facts in their social relations. Accordingly, the Doctor feels it as no concern of his to see what his discovery may lead to. Any person who had the welfare of the community really at heart would have been aghast at the perspectives opened up by such a discovery. Not so the Doctor. He rides the hobby-horse of principle, and to the man who rigorously bases his conduct on principle it is, in fact, a matter of conscience not to shy any sidelong utilitarian glances in the direction of possible consequences, inasmuch as such glances would be apt to vitiate the precise moral aim of his conduct.

Thus Stockmann turns out to be an extremely dangerous individual to any community. For a man who is pugnacious by temperament, who is always ready to start a fight to

prove that he is right, and who at the same time is conscious of merely doing his duty, of following the voice of his conscience and of "setting aside his personal interests for the sake of his deepest, holiest convictions"—this sort of man will always have occasion to take up arms for the sake of truth and justice. He will always see things as either black or white; his reformer's ardor will never be dampened by any disquieting realization of there being perhaps two sides, or even more than two sides to a question. His conscience will always unerringly tell him what path to pursue; for, since he sees things from only one angle, he can apply his crude moral yardstick to the most delicate question without the least sense of inadequacy. Matthew Arnold's formulation of the "Hebraistic" attitude of mind, pushed to its extreme, expresses his outlook upon life. The "Hebraist," we remember, is primarily, if not exclusively, concerned with acting according to the best light that he has; whereas the "Hellenist," less concerned with acting, is more intent on increasing his lights. By which I would not be understood to imply that the Burgomaster and his ilk are "Hellenists" in any sense of the word.

Of course, our criticism of the Doctor is based on the assumption that the social welfare is a vital matter,—the social welfare, bound up in this specific case, with the actual carrying out of the necessary reforms. But on this very point the Doctor, if consistent, would most sharply take issue with us. The social welfare, he would say, is of only accidental import as compared with the vindication of truth for its own sake. It is man's supreme duty to tell the truth; and if society withers under its hot flame, so much the worse for society; let it perish! This is the position of the ethical absolutist, who looks upon life as but an agency for the realization of abstract morality, instead of viewing

morality from the biological angle as the regulation of conduct in the interest of life. As in the Doctor's case, life itself invariably refutes the position of the ethical absolutist by demonstrating to him, as it did to Brand, that the earth has no use for such as he.

Now let us see how the Doctor continues in the course on which he has embarked so recklessly.

At noon, on the day after the Doctor had made his discovery, the Burgomaster visits his brother and gives him to understand that for personal "and other" reasons he is very loth to take official cognizance of the Doctor's report. He would be politically discredited, if the responsibility for bungling the construction of the waterworks were to be laid squarely at his door. The Doctor now has his choice between several courses of action. Supposing that he really cherished kindly feelings toward his brother, he could offer to revise his report in such a way as to eliminate its exultingly offensive tone and leave it to the initiative of the Board to investigate the means for remedying the trouble. On the other hand, if he is anxious to have his brother get his deserts, he has the perfect right to insist that his brother, in his capacity of chairman, submit the report to the Baths' Committee; and if his brother refuses, it would be perfectly in order for him to hand his report to the officer next in rank. Now supposing that the Board refused to consider his communication or to take energetic action, it would be up to the Doctor to resign his position. Then he would be free to give the matter the fullest publicity through the press, at home and abroad. It is reasonable to suppose that the fear of such action on his part would be sufficient to force the hand of the Board, from mere motives of prudence; for any board of directors can be credited with enough business sense to know that damaging publicity

would ruin the whole enterprise. But the Doctor considers neither of these legitimate alternatives. Yielding to his personal animus against his hectoring and hypocritical brother, he rushes to the offices of the press and gives Hovstad full authority to bring the report out in print.

So much is clear by now: Whoever wins, whether it be the Doctor or the Burgomaster, the Baths are certain to be the loser. Their reputation abroad will be damaged beyond repair by the noisy airing of the dispute among the public of the borough. Supposing the Doctor wins, the closing of the Baths for a couple of years will be the signal for brisk competition among the neighboring towns for diverting the stream of invalids to their own shores. By the time the Baths are reconditioned, the confidence of the outside public will have been so thoroughly undermined that there will be no patients forthcoming. Facts are never the sole factor in maintaining or building a reputation. As a matter of fact we know that the Doctor loses out, so far as the press and the sentiment of the town is concerned. Yet the result is the same. The day after the Doctor's speech the stocks of the Baths sell for a song. The undertaking is discredited. Doctor Stockmann has succeeded in ruining the town.

We never looked at the situation from that angle when we cheered the Doctor in his spectacular fight. The fact is, once the conflict had become acute, we didn't give a tinker's dam about the Baths or the Town. We had forgotten all about technical and economic considerations. All we saw was a moral issue, in which from moment to moment the contrast between white righteousness and black crookedness became more intense. It served them right, we felt, those grotesque mummies, those sanctimonious blackguards and the whole cowardly mass of their followers—it served them

right to reap the fruits of their lying hypocrisy, to be shown up in their despicable rottenness by the stalwart hero, the champion of truth, who grows, in fact, to the stature of a martyr. For has he not sacrificed his future and made paupers of his family, all because he would not descend to the low level of hypocrisy where he would have had to feel like spitting in his own face?

The play began by sounding the keynote of temperamental antipathy and personal jealousy. Imperceptibly the focus of the conflict was warped and twisted, until we saw it—were forced to see it—as a struggle of right against might. This turn guaranteed the play the whole-hearted applause of the compact majority of right-minded citizens and æsthetic philistines (begging the reader's pardon and our own!). The moral issue is always popular. We have but to remember that when a government finds itself drifting into war, its first task is to find a moral issue around which to rally the idealism of the country. Call the war a crusade against the foe of morality and civilization, and you are certain of the support of the compact majority.

"An Enemy of the People" is undeniably a successful play. My quarrel with Ibsen is about the means by which he has achieved its success. He has tricked our judgment like a dexterous lawyer. By manipulating the conflict until it comes to look like a clean-cut moral issue, by dinning the terms truth and lie into our ears, he makes us succumb to the Doctor's own moral word-fetishism. We see the Doctor as uprightness personified, as the defender of truth for truth's sake; we are tricked into forgetting that it is personal jealousy, an extremely good opinion of himself, a thirst for power and the love of stirring up a tempest, which are at the bottom of his conduct. We are tricked into taking his word for it that he loves his native town very

dearly, whereas in reality he shows the most callous indifference to its material welfare. The Doctor's glee over his discovery, his mania of rushing into print, are represented as harmless temperamental idiosyncrasies, serving to endear him to us all the more, by contributing to our comic gratification,—when in reality they are evidences of an alarmingly anti-social point of view. With an adroitness that would do credit to an accomplished demagogue, Ibsen has fooled us into believing that the unsocial anti-social Doctor Stockmann is a genuine friend of the people.

Let it be said at once: To make my point clear, I have been forced to overstate the case. That Ibsen should have sacrificed his objectivity through a deliberate desire to cater to the taste of the public is, of course, out of the question. The discrepancy between the premises and the conclusion of the play is due to a clash of forces in Ibsen's own self. We have only to reverse our approach to the problem to see this at once.

At the beginning of this chapter I stated that this play was fathered not by a problem but by a definite purpose. Ibsen felt the urge to find an outlet for his pent-up indignation, to lash his countrymen with his scorn for their political and social muddling, to drive home his conviction that the time for a radical house-cleaning was at hand. It was this urge that begot the situation and the characters of the play. The figure of Doctor Stockmann was conceived to fill Ibsen's need for a mouthpiece through which he could hurl at the world, in a single bombardment, all the unpleasant "truths" that had been accumulating in his mind for more than a decade. Now it happened that the psychologist in Ibsen was not dozing all the time while the irate reformer was on a rampage; at intervals he double-crossed his partner by sawing through the props on which

the fine ethical façade of the Doctor's indignation was built. Of course, he had to do this furtively, as it was a piece of sabotage, directed against his own creation. It was a case of taking care not to let the right hand know what the left hand was doing; and to make this possible, the whole play had to be steeped in the changing, unreal, iridescent lights of comedy, where make-believe, somehow or other, contrives to take liberties which we do not tolerate in serious realistic drama.—

"An Enemy of the People" marks in many respects a short-lived but all the more vigorous renewal of the turbulent ferment of Ibsen's earlier storm and stress. The political and social message of Ibsen-Stockmann's dramatic sermon, which it remains for us to study, is anything but the mellow fruit of mature wisdom. The indignant reformer chafes at the bit; time and again he jumps the traces to bolt away from the thinker, at a breakneck gallop, over cliffs and precipices.

The fiction, brilliantly sustained, that the ideas contained in the Doctor's impromptu broadside had crystallized in two days—hence their provocative paradoxical form—must not let us lose sight of the fact that ideas just as revolutionary in substance and not a whit less extreme in form had been churning in Ibsen's brain for more than a decade. Ibsen frankly admits the substantial identity of viewpoint uniting him with the Doctor, in the letter with which he posted his manuscript to his publisher. "Doctor Stockmann and I got on excellently together," he writes on September 9, 1882; "we agree on so many subjects. But the Doctor is a more muddle-headed person than I am, and he has, moreover, several other characteristics for the sake of which people will stand hearing a good many things from him

which they might perhaps not have taken in such very good part had they been said by me." As we see, Ibsen, with his native caution, indorses the Doctor with reservations; moreover he admits that there was method in hiding his own caustic self under the winning geniality of the Doctor's temperament.

In two letters of the year 1872, written at an interval of less than two weeks, Ibsen formulates the tenets which stand out ten years later as the Doctor's most important discoveries. On March 21, in a letter to Frederick Gjertsen, he tersely refers to the statement that the minority is always in the right as "my fundamental principle in every field and domain." In a letter to Georg Brandes, dated April 4, we find the Doctor's final discovery stated as follows: "To me it appears that the man who stands alone is the strongest." It is at bottom the same view of things which finds expression in an earlier letter to Brandes. A man with a mission, he writes on March 6, 1870, can not afford the luxury of keeping friends. They are too costly, not because of anything one has to do in their behalf, but because of what one has to refrain from doing in order to keep their friendship. Friendship, Ibsen has found, involves the unavoidable compromise of rigid principle; and compromise, we know from "Brand," is the very devil.

Even in the revolutionary fervor of his radicalism Ibsen yields not an inch to the Doctor's excited outbursts. We must content ourselves here with touching on only a few of the high lights of his pertinent utterances. Among the most characteristic of these is a poem of 1869, addressed to a revolutionary agitator. In defending himself against the charge of political indifference, Ibsen here calls for a more radical revolution than any contemplated by the politicians. Only one thoroughgoing revolution in the world's history

he admits: the deluge. But even that, according to him, was bungled, since Noah was left to float securely in his ark. Let the thing be done over again, he exclaims. The next time I'll put a torpedo under the ark! The trouble with the politicians—Ibsen says in the period of his most stimulating interchange of ideas by letter with Georg Brandes—is that they want only their own special revolutions—revolutions in externals, in politics.[3] From special revolutions Ibsen expects no good. The whole race is on the wrong track; that is the trouble.[4] In anticipating the dawn of the Third Empire, he embraces the creed of philosophic anarchism: "The state must be abolished! In that revolution I will take part. Undermine the idea of the state, make willingness and spiritual kinship the only essentials in the case of a union—and you have the beginning of a liberty that is of some value.[5] He had startled Brandes by the paradox, a little earlier, in commenting on the termination of the Italian troubles: "And then the glorious aspiration after liberty—that is at an end now. Yes—I must confess that the only thing I love about liberty is the struggle for it; I care nothing for the possession of it."[6] Brandes' skeptical rejoinder to the whimsically humorous tone of this confession provoked a serious explanation on Ibsen's part: "What I call the struggle for liberty is nothing but the constant, living assimilation of the idea of freedom. He who possesses liberty otherwise than as a thing to be striven for, possesses it dead and soulless; for the idea of liberty has undoubtedly the characteristic, that it develops steadily during its assimilation. So that a man who stops in the midst of the struggle and says: 'Now I have it'—thereby shows that he has lost it. It is, however, exactly

[3] Dec. 20, 1870.
[4] Sept. 24, 1871.
[5] Feb. 17, 1871.
[6] Dec. 20, 1870.

this dead maintenance of a certain given standpoint of liberty that is characteristic of the communities which go by the name of states—and this it is that I have called worthless." [7] All very well as a philosophic attitude, Brandes doubtless said to himself; but what bearing has it on the concrete Italian situation?

Somewhat later, again, we find Ibsen dwelling on struggle as such, as the embodiment of real values. With reference to Brandes' own revolution in the world of letters, he writes: "What will be the outcome of this mortal combat between two epochs, I do not know; but, anything rather than the existing state of affairs—so say I. I do not promise myself that any permanent improvement will result from the victory; all development hitherto has been nothing more than a stumbling from one error into another. But struggle is good, wholesome, and invigorating." [8] The same letter contains a concrete application of his ideas to Scandinavian politics: "Dear friend, the Liberals are freedom's worst enemies. Freedom of thought and spirit thrive best under absolutism; this was shown in France, afterwards in Germany, and now we see it in Russia."

Of particular interest as regards our play is a passage from a letter to Lorentz Dietrichson: "It appears to me doubtful whether better artistic conditions can be attained in Norway before the intellectual soil has been thoroughly turned up and cleansed, and all the swamps drained off." This bears the date of December 18, 1879. So the symbolism of poison-exuding stagnation [9] had fastened on Ibsen's mind several years before "An Enemy of the People" was written, which makes it clear, by the way, that the metaphor antedates the plot, instead of the reverse.

[7] Feb. 17, 1871. [8] April 4, 1872.

[9] As a matter of fact the figure already occurs in "Pillars of Society."

Two more passages from Ibsen's letters to Brandes must be quoted because, contrary to the pessimistic keynote of his earlier utterances, they presuppose a belief in progressive evolution. On January 3, 1882, at the time when "An Enemy of the People" was germinating in his mind, he writes: "It will never, in any case, be possible for me to join a party that has the majority on its side. Björnson says: 'The majority is always in the right.' And as a practical politician he is bound, I suppose, to say so. I, on the contrary, must of necessity say: 'The minority is always right.' Naturally I am not thinking of that minority of stagnationists who are left behind by the great middle party which with us is called Liberal; but I mean that minority which leads the van, and pushes on to points which the majority has not yet reached. I mean: that man is right who has allied himself most closely with the future." And on June 12th of the following year he attempts to elucidate the Doctor's position in the following terms: "As to the 'Enemy of the People,' if we had a chance to discuss it, I think we should manage to come to an agreement. You are, of course, right when you say that we must all work for the spread of our opinions. But I maintain that a fighter in the intellectual vanguard can never collect a majority around him. In ten years the majority will, possibly, occupy the standpoint which Doctor Stockmann held at the public meeting. But during these ten years the Doctor will not have been standing still; he will still be at least ten years ahead of the majority. He can never have a majority with him. As regards myself, at least, I am conscious of incessant progression. At the point where I stood when I wrote each of my books, there now stands a tolerably compact crowd; but I myself am no longer there; I am elsewhere; farther ahead, I hope."

All these quotations, besides establishing the solidarity of Ibsen with Doctor Stockmann in all essentials, bring home to us the complexity of Ibsen's own intellectual position. No single formula will avail to express Ibsen's outlook on life; it harbors too many contradictory elements. Indignation is the mother of his philosophy. The pathos of disillusioned idealism sounds the keynote of his thinking. Ibsen's favorite attitude is to take up his position in the impregnable fortress of absolute idealism. He does that in "Brand," where he sounds the clarion call of All or Nothing, where he brands compromise—the law of life—as the radical evil. He does that again, in demanding that human society totally reorganize itself on lines of purely voluntary coöperation, unappalled by the fact that this demand flies in the face of the most deeply rooted instincts of human nature. Unappalled by this fact . . . , rather led on by it; for the impossibility of life's ever meeting his demands provides the surest guarantee against his ever having to relinquish his basic attitude of protest against life as existing and real. And protest, we know from "Love's Comedy," "Brand" and "Peer Gynt," had been the most stimulating factor in his creative production. Yet this fact should make us wary of taking his absolute idealism too seriously. In his reflective moments, at least, Ibsen resorted to it more as a fiction providing the best working basis for ethical progress. Only by willing the impossible, he thought, can the utmost possible be wrung from slothful human nature.

If we look sharply, we find, in fact, that Ibsen does concede a certain value to life as it is. At any rate he finds value in struggle. "Struggle is good, wholesome and invigorating." The permanent results may be negligible; it may be a mere see-saw from error to error; but his indorsement of struggle is essentially an affirmation of life. Life

is good, he is compelled to say; for it harbors the possibility of fine tragedies.

And presently he goes farther: Life is not only struggle and movement, but the movement has a definite forward swing. He sees leaders in the van, and stragglers in the rear. The whole, seemingly inert mass is moving forward. Forward, that means it is good, if it means anything.

What then becomes of his indignation? By seeing life as a rhythmical process and pronouncing it good, he has deprived himself of any philosophical basis to fume in indignation against the whole universal process. But Ibsen's temperament comes to the rescue. Seen as a whole, the process of life is an invigorating struggle, with even a forward swing; but—its tempo is intolerably sluggish, measured against the tempo of Ibsen's own feverish blood. He would leap on and on, to ever greater heights, opening up wider and wider panoramas; but this onward rush is retarded by the snail's crawl of human nature—human nature around him and human nature within his own vitals, from which escape is impossible. Ever and again the feel of these fetters throws him into new paroxysms of rage. Then he forgets all that he has learned. He brandishes the absolute before the face of life, and finding it a misshapen caricature of the ideal, he flies at the throat of life in a frenzy of destructive ire.

Does this not also describe the position of the Doctor? Of course, it does one's heart good to hear his blunt and fearless exposure of the legends of democracy: the democratic myth of equality; the infallibility of the majority; the sham liberalism of our majority parties, whether they style themselves Liberal or Republican or Democratic as good Norwegians or one hundred per cent Americans. It is refreshing to hear party organization shown up in its

character of a ruthless steam-roller that crushes and maims the spires of intellectual independence. The Doctor is perfectly right when he says that the masses, far from being the flower of a nation, as vote-catching demagogues and muddle-headed romanticists would have us believe, are but the raw material that must be fashioned into a people. But —all this perfectly sound criticism is vitiated by the indignation of the firebrand against the universal process of life as such. Hovstad has put the Doctor's mind on the track of using the poison-breeding stagnation of the Baths as a political catchword. Doctor Stockmann is too naïve to exploit a catchword deliberately: What happens is that the catchword takes possession of him; it becomes an obsession. From the moment he uses the word, it ceases to be a metaphor; it looms in his mind as a living reality. The absolute ideal has him in its grip, as he shouts: "All our sources of spiritual life are poisoned; our whole society rests upon a pestilential basis of falsehood." He has grasped the relativity of all political and social values; but he succumbs to the obsession of the metaphor in formulating this insight as follows: Truths are constantly turning into lies. A normal truth lives at most a space of twenty years; then, like a ham turned rancid, it spoils, becomes a lie and infects society with its moral scurvy. Now, in the nature of things, as the Doctor admits, the lethargic masses of the population, the majority, never come to adopt a truth until it has become stale and rotten; hence they are perpetually feeding on poison and will feed on it as long as the rhythm of life continues. So, from the standpoint of his metaphor he is perfectly logical in shouting: "The masses, the majority, this devil's own compact majority—it's that, I say, that's poisoning the sources of our spiritual life, and making a plague-spot of the ground beneath our feet." And

the corollary is obvious: "All men who live upon a lie ought to be exterminated like vermin." Now, connecting up these statements, which all have their source in his indignant absolute idealism, we find that they range themselves into the following syllogism: Truths are forever turning into lies. All men who live upon a lie ought to be exterminated. The great mass of humanity is forever feeding on truths that have turned into lies. Hence, the whole human race, barring the small band of outposts who are fighting the poison, ought to be wiped off the face of the earth.

A fine conclusion for a physician to arrive at! Can't we see him cutting out his patients' diseased vitals, overjoyed at the confirmation of his diagnosis, despite the minor circumstance that he kills them the more quickly in the process? We remember that Brand, the physician of the soul, was just as radical. To him life was a little thing, compared to the vindication of the ideal. The soul of just one woman he managed to save, and her he killed in the process.

What is wrong with the Doctor's absolute idealism? Why does Life laugh at his impotent railing?

The Doctor's own insight into the relativity of values is his own logical undoing. Only, he manages to deceive himself by formulating his insight in terms that don't fit the case. He lays about himself with the double pair of terms "right and wrong"; "truth and lie"; and, besides failing to fit the case, these terms contradict each other.

It is senseless to say that the majority is always right, ipso facto, unless one means to utter a tautology expressing the basic conventional working rule of the political and social "game" as practiced in democratic communities. Nothing is thereby predicated about the wisdom of the majority's decision. But it is equally senseless to make a maxim of its opposite and say: The minority is always right.

Of course, it goes without saying that the people who think independently are hopelessly outnumbered by the unthinking mob in any community at any time. But the statement, that the minority is always in the right, means something very different. It implies, in effect, that every issue resolves itself automatically into a clear-cut progressive and an equally clear-cut reactionary point of view. It schematizes and falsifies life by implying that all thinking dissenters point in the same direction. As if the present did not open as many vistas to the future as there are points to the compass!

In formulating the paradox about the minority always being in the right, the natural scientist got in the way of the social thinker. Strictly speaking, the terms right and wrong pertain only to relations of fact. When Galileo contended that the earth moved, in opposition to the compact majority of theologians, he was right and they were wrong. But what the Doctor has in mind is not matters of fact at all; "truths" of the sort which Galileo established do not become rancid and turn into lies in a space of twenty years. It is obvious that the Doctor is talking about matters very indirectly related to facts in the scientific sense, . . . matters like socialism, the open shop, prohibition, vivisection, birth control,—to mention only a few of the issues that at present agitate the popular consciousness.

In a developing society new issues are constantly coming to the fore, and issues which hotly agitated our forefathers are dead to us;—think of the religious wars! Principles which were felt as adequate to life, when formulated,—unrestricted economic competition, for instance—have to be modified as a result of the growing complexity of modern life. Life in all its phases is engaged in a constant process of adaptation to new conditions.

The Doctor is aware of this, after a fashion; but see the hopeless tangle in which he involves himself by forcing the phases of this process into his ethical strait-jacket. Truth and lie, he calls these phases; and he takes his terms literally. A lie, being a wilful misstatement intended to deceive, is a moral poison; and poison is the daily food of the masses. The exclusiveness of the Doctor's ethical outlook on life amounts to monomania. He reduces every issue to a struggle between staunch uprightness and wilful malice, to a fight between gods and devils; and the worst of it is: his gods turn into devils almost overnight and have to be fought by new gods, with tooth and claw.

How absurd when reduced to fundamentals; yet how refreshing as a comedy! We can show the Doctor's absurdity up piecemeal, only to find at the end of our labors that our comic delight in his racy personality is as vivid as it was at the outset!

In "An Enemy of the People," Ibsen formulated his social philosophy in aphoristic and paradoxical fashion—or at least attempted to; this much is clear to every Ibsen student.

Hence we were bound to consider the Doctor's point of view in all seriousness and analyze it, with due reference to Ibsen's personal utterances, as to the kernel of its content.

Simple enough it seemed, no doubt, to the reader, as he saw us mount our charger and put our critical lance in rest.

But maybe, by the time we got through, he may have begun vaguely to suspect that we have been charging windmills.

Perhaps not; yet we have the feeling of having been

caught up in the vortex of a whirlwind. The ground under our feet seemed solid enough when we began our critical analysis. But by and by everything began to reel most disconcertingly.

At first we felt tolerably sure that Ibsen stood squarely behind his doughty Doctor. When we showed up the contradictions in his views, we thought we had scored a victory over Ibsen.

But our confidence received a jar, when on several occasions we noticed what seemed like Ibsen furtively delivering an impish slap, behind our backs, at his temperamental hero. Worse still, the time came when we were no longer able to tell with any assurance whether Ibsen was serious or whether he was laughing at himself.

We begin to suspect that Ibsen felt it in his blood that he was about to react with his accustomed choleric vigor against the very ideas which he himself had so stoutly championed and of which he makes the Doctor the spokesman; that in order to accelerate this reaction he rushes with headlong violence to the aid of his Doctor; that he intentionally develops his one-sided ideas to the limit, in order to see them topple all the more swiftly by their inherent lack of poise.

Intentionally, I say, and yet not with full consciousness.

Perhaps this statement of the case approaches the truth: Ibsen wanted to drive it home to us, pound it in to us with sledge-hammers, that the Doctor was right. But, radical individualist that he was, he couldn't brook the idea of our agreeing with him; so, with the sure instinct that he would grow out of and above the Doctor's viewpoint, he subtly prepared the ground for reservations which he would some day utter as a surprising come-back.

Ibsen's very next play is such a come-back. In the "Wild

Duck" the truth fanatic is mercilessly exposed as a sorry mischief-maker.

"An Enemy of the People" marks the last bright flare-up of the preacher in Ibsen. Not that the white-hot flame of his indignation could ever have turned into a warm mellow glow; but he never gave it full rein again in his subsequent plays. Instead of trying to make life over, he bent his efforts to the task of studying life as it is. He became more and more a miner, a burrower underground in the dark and hidden channels that converge toward the pulsing center of the individual's psychic life. There he observed, and listened, and traced the flux of elemental impulses in their mingling with one another; in their course upward toward the seat of consciousness; in their final deceptive rationalization, where, frequently enough, they appear as moral and altruistic when translated into words and actions. And throughout all the underground search, where he gleaned his greatest harvests, the resentment of the baffled reformer followed him. He never forgave life for not measuring up to his original ideals. He forced himself to see with uncanny clearness that human life is anchored in biological facts; that the self, instead of being metaphysically free and indeterminate, is the product of forces of the past; that the process of growth is a constant reaction to surrounding conditions; that the law of life, in short, is adaptation, or, to use the ugly word he abominated: compromise. The recognition that the basis of life is biological instead of ideally ethical deprived him of any tangible objective for his indignation. It gagged his rancor, but it did not placate it. His indignation took the form of a subtle, sometimes diabolical joy in recording the discrepancy between the ideal façade of an action and the psychological process which fathered it—in recording it not with the blatant and senti-

mental emphasis which had marked his exposure, for instance, of Consul Bernick, but with a delicacy calculated to keep his esoteric knowledge hidden from the less discerning reader. We must recall this fact when we come to analyze "Hedda Gabler" and "Little Eyolf."

## V

## THE WILD DUCK

The reader of the "Wild Duck" is apt to close the book with the feeling of coming away from a madhouse. The horror of the concluding scene—the most daring thing æsthetically, that Ibsen ever penned—is likely to reduce him to a state of physical weakness bordering on nausea. The realization of the import of that shot in the garret comes upon him with staggering suddenness; the hocus-pocus of the survivors over the corpse of the child is ghastly. In a later play of Ibsen's a similar shot rings out from behind drawn curtains, and hysterical shrieks accompany the discovery of Hedda Gabler's lifeless body; yet through the physical horror of that spectacle we feel a sense of relief at the termination of a superfluous existence, and we are spared the medley of melodrama and cynicism which is enacted over Hedwig's corpse.

First impressions, in dealing with so complicated a matter as Ibsen's plays, almost always come in for revision, just as in listening to the strange harmonies and rhythms of unfamiliar music. Unless the reader has dived down and bitten himself fast in the tangled undergrowth of his prejudices, further study will make him see this play in an entirely new light. Revolt against the unmediated grafting of tragedy upon satire will subside as he comes to perceive that Ibsen, with a boldness from which any other man would have shrunk, here uses tragic pathos as a device to make comedy but the more poignant.

Ibsen's own remarks on his new play are worth quoting, particularly for their picturing of the mood which possessed him when he conceived the situation and elaborated the characters. On June 12, 1883, he writes to Georg Brandes from Rome: "My mind is running just now on the plot of a new dramatic work in four acts. In course of time a variety of mad fancies (galskaber) are apt to collect in a man's mind, and he wants an outlet for them." A year later he was able to write an acquaintance: "All this winter I have been revolving some new bits of tomfoolery (galskaber) in my brain; I went on doing it until they assumed dramatic form; and now I have just completed a play in five acts—that is to say, the rough draft of it; now comes the elaboration, the more energetic individualization of the persons and their mode of expression." [1] And on September 2, in dispatching the completed manuscript to his publisher, he makes this characteristic comment: "For the last four months I have worked at it every day; and it is not without a certain feeling of regret that I part from it. Long, daily association with the persons in this play has endeared them to me, in spite of their manifold failings; and I am not without hope that they may find good and kind friends among the great reading public, and more particularly among the actor tribe—to whom they offer rôles which will well repay the trouble spent on them. . . .

"In some ways this new play occupies a position by itself among my dramatic works; in its method it differs in several respects from my former ones. But I shall say no more on this subject at present. I hope that my critics will discover the points alluded to; they will, at any rate, find several things to squabble about and several things to interpret. I also think that 'The Wild Duck' may very prob-

[1] Theodor Caspari, June 27, 1884.

ably entice some of our young dramatists into new paths; and this I consider a result to be desired."

Tomfoolery, mad fancies, Ibsen calls the themes on which his inventive imagination is playing; and half-apologetically he asserts his fondness for the characters that have emerged. But he can scarcely mean to include all of them in his remark. Gregers, at any rate, has had no sympathy wasted on him. The process of elaboration and more energetic individualization intervening between the first draft and the finished play, has left Gregers, if anything, more witless than the character originally projected. Hjalmar, on the other hand, and with him Gina and Hedwig, owe the vividness of their appeal almost wholly to the retouching activity of Ibsen's last four months of work on the play. If the amount of elaboration is in any way an index to the author's fondness for a character of his creation, then Hjalmar unquestionably occupies a very favored position; for, from the standpoint of the stage, Ibsen has spared no effort to endow Hjalmar for the star rôle of the play. Designed at first as a mere victim of the idealistic quacksalver, a thoroughly mediocre wretch in every respect, Hjalmar has been developed into a first-rate virtuoso of emotional melodrama. Just because we are never in the slightest danger of being taken in by Hjalmar's pose of melancholy, by the throb of his beautifully modulated voice and the moistening of his eyes, by the melodramatic oratory which he puts into play during the satisfaction of his ravenous appetite,—just for that reason we can yield without reserve to the comic appeal of the situation and laugh the more freely, the more grotesquely Hjalmar's fluent phrases are at odds with the facts.

For it would be a mistake on the reader's part to identify

himself too closely with any of the characters of "The Wild Duck." He must hold himself aloof, if he is to catch the mood of the author. To enter into the lives of Old Ekdal, Gina and Hedwig in a spirit of compassionate sympathy and to feel a corresponding resentment against Hjalmar, would be to spoil the unity of the tableau which Ibsen has painted. The Ekdal family does not call for any compassion; they have, if anything, a greater share of contentment and happiness than average human beings. Old Ekdal is so completely acclimatized to the make-believe forest he has built up, that he could not stand being transplanted back to the real life of out-of-doors; he scorns Gregers' offer to take him back to the mountains of Höjdal. Hedwig, too, feels completely at home in the studio and garret. She loves to play and to dream, and to read about the big world; but she has no longing to embark on the adventure of real experience; nothing could tempt her to quit the sheltered coziness of home. She worships her father, even though he is difficult at times. There is no danger of her becoming critical as to the value of his emotions, so long as the status quo of the family is preserved. As to Gina, she fills her sphere so completely by her noiseless and efficient management of the household and studio, that the question of happiness never enters her wholly matter-of-fact mind. She may be skeptical about the realization of Hjalmar's great invention—we do not really know to what extent—but that does not prevent her from regarding Hjalmar as a superior being: Since a person of his culture and accomplishments has condescended to marry such an unlettered woman as herself, it is only fitting that he should live a life of ease and comfort. She regards it as her privilege to minister to his needs. If any compassion were called for, it would be because these

people are so contented with their lot, because they have no higher aspirations, not because of any aspirations that have been checked and stifled by a tragic turn of their lives. But Ibsen does not treat the theme from that angle. He contemplates the situation from above; he extracts from it the humor with which the situation abounds. Like the Comic Spirit personified, he hovers over his creation and runs through the gamut of comedy, from kindly humor to the bloodiest satire; and if we would see this creation with its author's eyes, we must ascend to his high plane, we must fill our nostrils with the rarefied air of the heights and keep a close tether on our emotions.—

A man who has but one talent, that of enacting melodrama, is forced by an officious quacksalver to give himself the air of rebuilding his life on a new foundation of truth: this is essentially a comic subject. At the outset Hjalmar welcomes the return of Gregers, because the latter idolizes him; and he makes use of the opportunity to exhibit his melancholy in his most artistic style and to give full range to his emotional oratory. But the moment that he senses Gregers' intention to give his life a new direction, he becomes uneasy, and he expostulates half-imploringly with Gregers to let well enough alone. Hjalmar has just told Gregers of the fateful rôle the double-barrelled pistol has played in his family, and he has taken Gregers into his confidence as to the forth-coming invention with which he plans to restore the honor of the family, when the following dialogue takes place:

*Gregers.* My dear Hjalmar, I almost think you have something of the wild duck in you.

*Hjalmar.* Something of the wild duck? How do you mean?

*Gregers.* You have dived down and bitten yourself fast in the undergrowth.

*Hjalmar.* Are you alluding to the well-nigh fatal shot[2] that has broken my father's wing—and mine too?

*Gregers.* Not exactly to that. I don't say that your wing has been broken; but you have strayed into a poisonous marsh, Hjalmar; an insidious disease has taken hold of you, and you have sunk down to die in the dark.

*Hjalmar.* I? To die in the dark? Look here, Gregers, you must really leave off talking such nonsense.

*Gregers.* Don't be afraid; I shall find a way to help you up again. I too have a mission in life now; I found it yesterday.

*Hjalmar.* That's all very well; but you will please leave me out of it. I can assure you that—apart from my very natural melancholy, of course—I am as contented as any one can wish to be.

*Gregers.* Your contentment is an effect of the marsh poison.

*Hjalmar.* Now, my dear Gregers, pray do not go on about disease and poison; I am not used to that sort of talk. In my house nobody ever speaks to me about unpleasant things.

For the nonce Hjalmar is spared further disclosures by the call to lunch. But even during the feast Gregers can not refrain from reverting to the lugubrious subject. "I for my part don't thrive in marsh-vapors," is his reply to a little pleasantry on Relling's part. Which causes Hjalmar to expostulate, "Oh, don't begin with that stuff again!" But Gregers continues in the same vein, unperturbed even by the Doctor's threats to throw him downstairs; and he is on the point of seasoning the luncheon with the exposure of Gina's past, when the arrival of Old Werle and his request for a private talk with his son breaks up the feast and causes the postponement of Gregers' revelations to the interval between Acts III and IV. Hjalmar accepts Gregers' invitation to take a long walk. His fear of hearing unpleasant things is overborne by curiosity (he wants to know what

[2] Not Werle's shot, of course, but the two "shots" that never were fired.

Old Werle came for) and by the thrill of seeing himself act father confessor to an old friend who seems to require the staunch support which he feels able to offer. So Relling's and Gina's warnings fall on deaf ears.

Hjalmar's behavior on returning home, after Gregers has opened his eyes to Gina's past, must be viewed from the plane of high comedy. We know Hjalmar too well to fear for a moment that his glowering manner in facing Gina foreshadows any tragic crisis. Moreover, his announcement of his resolve to take the family bookkeeping into his own hands after this, start work in earnest and never set foot in the garret again—a program which is to be put into effect on the day after to-morrow—confirms our attitude of amused expectancy. For a man who is so sunk in physical contentment, so averse to unpleasant scenes, nothing is more painful than the necessity of making a fuss. It puts him to such a degree of physical discomfort that all his native phlegm must first be overcome before he can throw himself with any zest into the rôle of acting the shocked idealist. What Hjalmar wants to do is to enact a moving melodrama, calculated to end with a touching scene of reconciliation, if Gina will only play her part properly. If Gina could writhe in contrition; if she could confess, in a voice choked with tears, to excruciating pangs of conscience that had racked her soul during every hour of their married life, —then Hjalmar would be moved by her misery to rise to the attitude of lofty forgiveness; and with one arm around her and the other free for dramatic gesticulation, he would speak of the new consecration of their marriage, founded now on truth and sincerity. But Gina, by virtue of her wholly matter-of-fact nature, is quite unable to respond to Hjalmar's call for melodrama. Her failure to register tearful contrition checks the completion of the cycle of his emo-

tional play. Instead of finding relief in the grand gesture of forgiveness, Hjalmar is forced to develop his theme of indignation with new intensity, in the hope that Gina will eventually succumb to the spell of its suggestion and in her turn respond in a strain keyed to the emotional pitch of his own. Of course, the fulfillment of this expectation is out of the question. With every moment that the crisis is prolonged, the incongruity in the emotional pitch of their respective natures becomes more apparent, and the grotesqueness of the situation is enhanced. From moment to moment the need of Hjalmar's eventual backing-down becomes more evident, and each moment of postponement aggravates the inevitable anti-climax, which is reached the next morning when Hjalmar asks Gina's permission to occupy the living-room undisturbed by any interlopers until he can complete his preparations for moving. With that his threat of separating from Gina is permanently tabled.

But it is not merely the prosiness of Gina's temperament which prolongs and heightens Hjalmar's melodrama; there is another complicating factor. Hjalmar knows that in Gregers' eyes he is a very superior being. This makes him self-conscious. He feels the eyes of Gregers fixed on him in the crisis, and he wants to live up to the ideal Hjalmar of Gregers' fancy. To that end he adopts Gregers' phrase about the claim of the ideal and reiterates it with comic emphasis. The flattery to himself implied in Gregers' attitude of hero-worship and the pressure put upon him to live up to the rôle that has been wished on him, stimulate his native penchant for play-acting.

Gregers, having presented his ideal demand, is not content to let things take their natural course. He hopes to "cash in" on his claim by an effective "follow-up." Like the clever dog that he longed to be, he harasses poor Hjal-

mar and drives him from one pose of ideal pathos into another. First, with his ill-timed desire to witness the edifying spectacle of the reconciliation between husband and wife, he breaks in upon Hjalmar's lyrically plaintive mood and increases his irritation. Then, as Mrs. Sörby comes and delivers Old Werle's offer of continued financial aid to Hjalmar, Gregers answers her in Hjalmar's stead and gives him the cue for his theatrical demand of an accounting for every penny received from Werle. As if his cup of bitterness were not already filled to overflowing, Gregers proceeds to squeeze out of him, the moment Mrs. Sörby has gone, reluctant professions of gratitude for his meddling.

*Gregers.* (Laying his hand on Hjalmar's shoulder.) My dear Hjalmar—was it not a good thing I came?

*Hjalmar.* Yes.

*Gregers.* Are you not glad to have had your true position made clear to you?

Hedwig enters, gayly flourishing her birthday letter. Curiosity leaves Hjalmar no peace until he has read it. But as soon as he has announced its contents, Gregers prods him to a new gesture of exalted idealism: The letter is but another trap set to catch Hjalmar. Now, Gregers continues, the moment has arrived that will prove once for all who has sized up Hjalmar's personality correctly, himself or his father. So, with the clever dog again at his heels, there is nothing for Hjalmar to do but to rise to the occasion with another fine gesture. Slowly he tears the letter across and lays it on the table with the words: "Here is my answer."

The events of the day have completely unstrung poor Hjalmar's nerves. Short scenes of lyrically modulated melodrama, from which he could always recuperate by an ample supply of bread and butter, were his specialty; but the pro-

longed enactment of high tragedy overtaxed his powers of endurance. Having seen the tranquillity of his home crumble, having been forced by the idealist's harassing presence to relinquish the boon of guaranteed economic ease when he actually held it in his grasp; having found in the dubious paternity of the child a focus in which the varied motifs of his misery could be assembled into a great strain of heart-rending grief, he seeks refuge in temporary flight. On the morrow he returns, in such a state of katzenjammer and exhaustion, that his feeble gestures of protest no longer stave off the moment of the anti-climax. His plaintive oratory has to yield to Gina's stubbornly prosaic attitude of common-sense: he accepts Gina's coffee and bread and butter, reserving his disdain for the salt meat that turns his stomach. But Hjalmar has hardly settled down to his breakfast, while Gina prepares the chamber, when Gregers shows his face again. Poor Hjalmar, hounded out of his momentary relaxation, feels obliged to come up to the idealist's expectations by resuming his irksome rôle of martyrdom. How annoying is Gina's lack of tact in asking him in Gregers' presence which he wants her to do, to pack up his belongings or get his room in order! What can he answer but the equivocal: "Pack—*and* get the room in order!"

It is indeed a ludicrous situation—more ludicrous for the utter lack of a sense of humor on the part of all three. Gina is not alarmed at Hjalmar's threat to leave her; she knows that she is indispensable to his physical comfort; so she is quite willing to assist Hjalmar in the preliminaries to his departure, assured as she is that the practical demonstration of what the step would involve will nip its execution far more effectively than the most eloquent argument. Gregers, however, is alarmed, for he still takes Hjalmar at his word. Hjalmar himself is in a most trying position. He

wants to stay, and of course he is going to stay, but he cannot formally declare his intention to do so before a melodramatic reconciliation has been enacted; and the opportunity for such a reconciliation has up to the present been denied him owing to Gina's inability to become hysterical. Chiefly in order to torture Gina and make her abandon her composure does he make the sensitive and wholly innocent child bear the brunt of his displeasure; for if he can get Hedwig thoroughly worked up, Gina will be under a double fire.

To the topic of Hedwig Hjalmar returns in pouring out his heart to Gregers, as this is the most grateful theme that has suggested itself to the virtuoso of melodrama. He lets his imagination prefer the most ridiculous charges against the child. Not that he seriously believes a word of what he utters, but it gives him a chance to make a most effective display of his unhappiness. As his lamentations reach their climax, fate seems indeed to play into his hands by conjuring up a situation which promises immediate and complete relief from the tension which he had been laboring so frantically to sustain. A shot rings out from the garret, and it is now Gregers' turn to prove to Hjalmar how sincerely devoted the child was to him, since she has offered up her most cherished possession as a voluntary sacrifice for his sake. Hjalmar is moved, and lo, a miracle has happened, which clinches the issue. There stands Gina, not prosy and practical as usual, but actually struggling with tears. Clearly, the psychological moment for the effective termination of the melodrama has arrived. Such a moment may never return. Hjalmar acts. He tears open the kitchen door and with tender accents calls the child back to his heart.

Fate has tricked him. The melodrama does not end according to plan. Its aspect of intellectual humor changes

to bloody irony. The melodrama is played to a finish over the corpse of the child. Not even the presence of death can force a hush. For a last time all the warped and maimed existences of this household are gathered together to act an ensemble so shockingly grotesque that the reader must be steeled with an Aristophanic sense of the comic in order not to succumb to the ghastly aspect of the performance. Hjalmar makes the house reverberate with his theatrical pathos. Relling, the cynic, affects a cold and dispassionate attitude. Old Ekdal departs for the garret with imbecile mutterings. The sodden theologian travesties the words of Christ. Of them all, only the mother deports herself with a simple dignity which adds a touch of nobility to the drab prose of her existence.

This ending shows that in the poet's mind the basic mood of comedy survives even the pathos of Hedwig's futile sacrifice. And if we join him in viewing the spectacle of her death from on high, we are reconciled in a measure to the thought of her passing. In her voluntary death the shy and backward, yet altogether winsome child achieves a beauty which continued life could not have maintained. She had no future, no development to look forward to. Even in the period of adolescence, when dormant faculties begin to stir, she was quite content to remain immured within the confines of her little make-believe world. There was never a longing in her to transpose imagination into reality. A few years hence she would have been rigidly set—the mind of a child in the body of a woman; and the doom of her blindness would have made of her a pathetic fixture of a make-believe world in which time had come to a standstill.

So "The Wild Duck" does not begin as a comedy and end as a tragedy. It is a comedy from start to finish. Ibsen injects tragedy into comedy, to make comedy but the more

poignant. With Ibsen we must look down from the heights upon the human menagerie assembled in the studio, and we must keep a close tether on our emotions.—

"The Wild Duck" is an instance of the most remarkable self-discipline imposed by the dramatist upon a very active part of his self. The moralist in him is for once put under lock and key, securely gagged and bound, while the intelligence of the artist contemplates from above with lingering minuteness the existence of the human animal that lives and thrives on lie, on sham, on make-believe. From above, from heights sufficiently far removed, so as to reduce the spectacle of life to the proportions of a marionette-show; from heights that leave the clarity of vision free from the beclouding vapors of hot indignation or intense sympathy.

The high perspective of comedy from which the interlaced lives of the characters in "The Wild Duck" are contemplated, involved several deviations from Ibsen's usual dramatic method. As a rule, critics have stressed the structural similarity linking "The Wild Duck" with "A Doll's House" and "Ghosts," to the point of overlooking some very striking differences. Like that of its two forerunners, the method of "The Wild Duck" is analytic; it reveals the past of the Werle and the Ekdal families piecemeal; a considerable share of the exposition is scattered through the fourth and fifth acts. What action there is in the play turns about the bringing to light of the hidden past. The two earlier plays, however, each present a situation which has long harbored a latent germ of conflict, and the action sets in at the point where matters are heading towards a crisis—a crisis that was bound to become manifest sooner or later. This type of play has been aptly called "the drama of ripe condition." Now "The Wild Duck" is not a drama of ripe condition in that sense at all. The affairs of the Ekdal family have not

been drifting toward any crisis during the fifteen years of that marriage. The longer that marriage continued, in fact, the more impossible it was that any crisis should develop to disrupt its harmony. The crisis that we witness in the play is the result of the wholly gratuitous meddling of an outsider with the affairs of the Ekdals. As a matter of fact it leaves the relation between husband and wife substantially unchanged; and but for the extension of the intruder's meddling to the adolescent child, the artificially induced crisis would pass over in a few days, leaving scarcely a trace.

And we observe another technical peculiarity of "The Wild Duck." In "A Doll's House," in "Ghosts," and later in "Rosmersholm," the dramatic spectacle is viewed essentially as a causal sequence. We are led to comprehend, link by link, the circumstances that have made the characters what they are. Ibsen's most subtle art is employed in the retrospective analysis to make us understand the significance of the crisis. In "The Wild Duck," on the other hand, it is rather a spatial tableau than a causal chain, which is put before us. Two whole acts are filled with a detailed presentation of the daily life of the Ekdals. Our interest is so completely absorbed by their daily occupation, their manner of talking and the make-believe world they have built up around them to make existence interesting, that the question as to how they came to develop into these people with these particular habits of living is quite secondary. So the remarks about their past, profuse though they are, strike us rather as obligatory incidentals than as revelations of primary importance. The fact that Hjalmar was coddled by two maiden aunts, that he was idolized at school and at college, is an interesting side light on his development, but it opens up no new perspectives as to the man's character. Some quite important aspects of the past are purposely,

perhaps, left rather hazy. For instance, the degree of blame on Old Werle's part for the souring and warping of his son's disposition is impossible to compute. We hear that the mother, whom Gregers resembled, was ugly to look upon. According to Gregers, Werle married her under the impression that she had money, and turned against her when he realized his mistake. There was never anything resembling family life in the Werle household. The mother drank to excess, and the father was a libertine. But of how these facts are related we get only subjectively colored versions from parties intent on making out a case either for or against. All that we do know definitely of their past is the disastrous effect of the marriage on mother and son, whereas the father, of hardier stamina, survived this crisis relatively unscathed, as he did the crisis in his business. As to Werle's personal appearance in the play, he makes a not unsympathetic impression. Again, we have no way of telling exactly to what extent it was chance and to what extent careful scheming on Old Werle's part which brought about the marriage between Hjalmar and Gina.

Likewise, the poet keeps us guessing as to the true parentage of Hedwig, despite the fact that some critics positively identify her as Werle's child while others just as emphatically claim her for Hjalmar. The evidence is all circumstantial. Gregers believes Hedwig to be his half sister. His early questioning of Gina reveals his suspicions on that score, and in Act IV he tries unsuccessfully to prevent Mrs. Sörby from mentioning his father's approaching blindness. What can make him do so but the feeling that Hjalmar is bound to draw his conclusions from the coincidence between Werle's and Hedwig's ailment, and the fear that harm may result from this disclosure before Hjalmar has won the spiritual victory over himself and forgiven Gina? Old

Werle himself doubtless suspects Hedwig of being his child. That is, at least, the natural interpretation to put on the endowment with which he secures her future. After his last personal appeal to Gregers had failed, he takes this step as a conciliatory move to counteract the effect of Gregers' revelations; and in entrusting the mission to Mrs. Sörby he relies on her native tact to cope with an admittedly difficult situation. We remember Mrs. Sörby expressing her disappointment at finding the men at home, since she had hoped to have a private talk with Gina. It is plausible to infer that the parentage of Hedwig was precisely the subject she had come to ask Gina about, at Werle's request. Perhaps the letter of endowment had even been given her to be used only at her discretion in case the situation were grave enough to warrant this transparent acknowledgment of Werle's responsibility for the child. However, be that as it may, Werle's endowment of Hedwig is most naturally motivated by the assumption that he believed himself to be her father. As to Gina herself, a case for either alternative can be made out from her behavior in the crisis. She is on her guard against Gregers from the outset. She perceives at once the meaning in Gregers' questions about the child's age and the length of time she and Hjalmar had been married. Similarly, she is uneasily conscious of the inferences to be drawn from the fact that both Hedwig and Werle are going blind. Her allusion to the weakness of the eyes of Hjalmar's mother has all the flavor of an answer thought out beforehand to cut off dangerous speculation. So Gina knows, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that Hedwig's parentage is not above suspicion so far as outward indications are concerned. Whether she knows more is quite another matter. When confronted by Hjalmar's question as to Hedwig's parentage, she bristles up; her primal mother instinct, aroused in de-

fense of her young, for one brief moment breaks through the crust of her temperamental phlegm. "You ask that!" she exclaims with flashing eyes; and as Hjalmar repeats the question she answers, "I don't know," continuing with disdainful indignation as he presses her further: "How should *I* know? A creature like me—." Her answer opens up three possibilities: Either she knows that Hedwig is Werle's child; in that case she deserves credit for a clever piece of acting—too clever for the simple, literal Gina, even for a moment of crisis. Or she knows that the child is Hjalmar's. Or, finally, she tells the exact truth in saying, I don't know. The last of these possibilities is the only one in keeping with her nature. Gina had concealed her past from Hjalmar, but she had never told him any lies. When Hjalmar had confronted her with Gregers' disclosure she had frankly admitted the facts, without any attempt at subterfuge. On the assumption that she actually does not know who is the father of her child, her indignation is quite spontaneous and natural, *when we take the exact phrasing of Hjalmar's original question into account.* Hjalmar had meant to ask, "Does Hedwig belong to me?" Instead, he gives his question a rhetorical turn which completely alters its meaning for the literal Gina. "I want to know whether—your child has the right to live under my roof," is what he did say, and it was in answer to this that Gina bristled up in indignation. "The idea of your asking such a question," her excess of emotion means to convey; "here I have been slaving for you these fifteen years; I have provided the income on which you lived; Hedwig and I have denied ourselves food and clothing for the sake of making you comfortable; never since the day of our marriage have I been unfaithful to you; and as for the child, she has given you all the love that a human being can crave. Even if she isn't your child, how can you

ask whether she has a right to live under your roof?" Only when Hjalmar repeats his question *without* the rhetorical flourish, when he asks outright, "Does Hedwig belong to me?"—only then does Gina answer, "I don't know."

Gregers suspects Hedwig of being his half sister; Old Werle believes her to be his child; Gina does not know; Hjalmar is out of the reckoning. What conclusion is the reader expected to reach?

As I see it, no precise conclusion at all. We may think that circumstances lean strongly in the direction of establishing Werle's fatherhood; or we may read her temperament and her artistic gifts as an indication pointing to Hjalmar as her father. But who is going to separate out with a sure hand the strands of heredity, and circumscribe neatly the effects of her home environment on the child? Unless one is a lover of argument for argument's sake, one does best to let the matter rest. The physical fact of Hedwig's parentage does not affect the development of the play one jot. What counts, and counts alone, is the psychological effect on the characters of Hedwig's dubious parentage.

In "The Wild Duck" the analysis of the past is subordinate and secondary in interest to the actual present situation. What interests us in the characters is the fixed individuality of each and their interaction. How they have come to be what they are—at this we shy a glance only in passing. No other play of Ibsen's approaches "The Wild Duck" in its detailed delineation of the *milieu* of a family.

The development of the action is correspondingly slow. Up to the interval between Acts III and IV nothing has happened. It is then that Gregers makes his disclosure to Hjalmar. Act I, so far as it is not exposition of the Werle family and its relation to the Ekdals, gives a snapshot of Old Ekdal and a time exposure of Hjalmar in an environ-

ment in which he is not at his ease. Gregers' remark at the end of the act, that at last he sees his mission in life, indicates his intention to provoke a crisis; it marks the incentive moment of the action. Act II presents a picture of the domestic ménage of the Ekdals. First we see mother and daughter in their accustomed daily environment. Then the old Grandfather makes his entrance and retires to his room to make merry by himself with his bottle of cognac. Hjalmar returns from the dinner party at the Werles', and now we see the central character of the play moving at his ease in his family circle; we note the contrast between his mood and his manners among guests and at home, and we take the man's measure. There is a knock at the door, and Gregers enters, apparently to make a friendly call, in reality to probe into Hjalmar's domestic life with the zeal of a social service worker. Fortune favors him singularly, because the Old Man, already heavily under the influence of liquor, insists on giving him a peep into the moonlit garret which forms his and Hjalmar's hunting-ground. At the end of this act the action is advanced one step by Gregers' arranging, despite Gina's reluctance, to move into the Ekdals' unoccupied room on the morrow. So far nothing has happened, we have at best a faint presentiment of Gregers' intent; but our curiosity is kept active by the realization that Gregers is entering the Ekdal household with an ulterior purpose.

In Act III the tableau is presented by daylight. Now we see by degrees how completely the life of the Ekdal family, always excepting the efficient and prosaic Gina, revolves about the garret with its furry and feathered inmates. We see the calibre of Hjalmar's work as photographer, and we come to understand that it is Gina who earns the family's living, while Hjalmar's thoughts run only to perfecting the

contrivances in his make-believe game-park. Hjalmar soon disappears behind the curtain to saw away at a new contraption, after leaving Hedwig, his beloved child whose impending blindness he has been lamenting, to continue his work of retouching photographs "on her own responsibility." Gregers, who has already made a mess of his room thanks to his hobby of self-help, wanders in and engages in conversation with Hedwig; and by accident he establishes a bond of sympathy between himself and the child—a bond that is fated to have disastrous consequences. Gregers happens to use the expression "paa havsens bund" (in the depths of the sea) instead of the more prosaic every-day expression "paa havets bund" or "havbunden" (at the bottom of the sea). It is a coincidence that the imaginative child has been in the habit of using that identical phrase in her day-dreams to express the sense of mystery which she feels about the strange contents of the garret. Gregers' use of her favorite expression stirs a sympathetic chord in Hedwig, who had, up to this moment, not felt at her ease in the presence of the newcomer. This one phrase establishes a secret understanding between them and replaces shyness by confidence, so that from now on Gregers has a hold on the child and can influence her in line with his purposes. This incident, a master stroke of motivation, is utilized by Ibsen toward a second end, as will appear later.

Hjalmar reappears, and soon we see Gregers preparing in earnest to open his eyes as to the unworthy foundation of his existence. He does not get beyond symbolical generalities, however, before the summons to lunch is heard. With that two more habitués of the Ekdal household make their appearance, the cynical Doctor Relling and the "demonic" theologian Molvik whom the former carries in tow. The meal begins inauspiciously with a passage at arms between

Gregers and the Doctor; and Gregers, irritated by the Doctor's presence, is preparing to present his ideal demand in the very midst of the feast when he is interrupted by the arrival of his father, who pleads with his son not to stir up trouble. But his plea only increases Gregers' irritability; so, the moment Old Werle is gone, Gregers invites Hjalmar to accompany him on the long walk which we must suppose to be taking place during the interval between Acts III and IV.

Three full acts are consumed in the preparation for the revelation that was to open Hjalmar's eyes. In the two acts remaining we witness the consequences of Gregers' well-meant but stupid meddling.

The revelation of the principal characters is handled in a similar leisurely way. This applies to Gregers and Hjalmar. We observe Hjalmar closely in the first act; we note his shyness and his melancholy; we find him unnerved at the unexpected appearance of his father amid the gay company, and the discrepancy between the act of denying his father and his protestations to Gregers of tender love for his parent does not escape us. Moreover, we find his well-fed outward appearance and the smug tone of his remarks about his wife (she is not altogether without culture, owing to her daily contact with himself) do not harmonize altogether with his air of melancholy. However, it is only in the second act that the obscured lines of his character give way to full clearness. The contrast between his silence in company and the airs he gives himself at home is exceedingly droll. Once we have heard him boast of the way he gave it to the chamberlains we cannot possibly take him seriously any more. It is as if a veil had dropped suddenly from our eyes.

We size up Hjalmar correctly almost the moment he steps into his home. It takes us far longer to make up our minds

in regard to Gregers. Without being forewarned, the reader would not suspect the Gregers of the first act to figure later as the butt of the poet's ridicule. His sentiments, as expressed during his first reunion with his old friend, strike us as high-minded; his manner, in dealing with his father whom he hates, shows him to be high-strung, neurotic, in fact; but we know too little about him as yet even to suspect him of being "cracked." His appearance in the second act does not materially alter that impression. We, who have seen through Hjalmar by this time, know, of course, how grotesquely Gregers is misjudging his friend, but then Gregers has not shared with us the opportunity of observing Hjalmar off his guard. The only thing that might give us pause is the morbid physical loathing that Gregers seems to feel with regard to his own person, as expressed in his comment on his name: "I feel I should like to spit upon the fellow that answers to such a name."

But if our attitude up to this time has been one of rather neutral curiosity with regard to Gregers, the developments of the next act force the conviction upon us that he must be viewed from the satirical angle. Gina's account of his clumsy mishaps in putting into practice his theories of self-help evokes a lightly contemptuous smile. Then Gregers enters and engages in a long conversation with Hedwig. Apparently he is lowering himself to her mental level, as he leads her on to chat about her wild duck and her other treasures; in reality he is thinking of nothing but his fancied mission. To the initiated the scene is replete with irony, so far as Gregers' part in it is concerned. However, we have not been sufficiently forewarned to detect this irony. Hence Gregers' mysterious question to Hedwig, "Are you quite sure that it's only a garret," mystifies us as much as it startles the child. But the scene that follows is scarcely

mistakable in its intent. With the spotlight of comedy fully turned on Hjalmar, his satellite catches enough of its reflection to be rendered exceedingly grotesque. We see him listening with imperturbable gravity to Hjalmar's account of the crises in his life and of the sustaining invention, and we witness his attempt to prepare the refractory ground of Hjalmar's soul for the seed of spiritual rebirth which he expects to implant by his revelation. For the reader who is skilled in detecting the overtones of Ibsen's orchestration, there is something subtly comic in Gregers' avowal: "I too have a mission in life now; I found it yesterday." Then in comes the Doctor and fires his satirical shafts point-blank at Gregers. The grotesque image of Gregers carrying the claim of the ideal in his coat-tail pocket and presenting it to every humble cottager sticks in one's mind. With that remark the signal is given for releasing our mirth. If its ebullition has been held in check up to this point by lingering doubt as to the author's intentions, it now breaks forth without restraint. Nothing can rehabilitate Gregers after that, as a character to be taken seriously. We review his earlier appearances, and now his whole personality is suffused with the hue of satire. Moreover, each of his subsequent acts compromises him further.

Hjalmar and Gregers are both comic figures, but the difference in treatment accorded them is enormous. There is personal rancor in the shafts shot at Gregers; in Hjalmar's case indignation is disarmed by the entertaining nature of his virtuosity. No malice guided the poet's hand in penning that droll scene which relates the antecedents of the pistol that Old Ekdal should have leveled against himself, that Hjalmar held in his hand (unloaded presumably) as he debated the tragic resolve, and that is now used to pop away at rabbits. The poet's delight is apparent in the deftness

with which Hjalmar exploits his hypothetical invention for purposes of self-admiration, self-justification and self-pity. First it was the Old Man with the silver hair (whose dirty reddish wig we have had occasion to observe) who was to gain permission to wear his uniform again, as a royal boon to be craved by the inventor in token of his touching filial affection. Next it was the securing of Hedwig's future which was to be the inventor's sole reward. Then Hjalmar pictures himself as expiring under the exhausting mental strain, happy in the consciousness of leaving his widow well provided for. Again the entire proceeds of the invention are requisitioned for repaying Werle to the last penny. And lastly, it was only tender love for Hedwig, the ungrateful child, which caused him to foster in himself the illusion of the invention, now recognized as vaporous. "Great heavens, what would you have me invent?" he exclaims. "Other people have invented almost everything already. It becomes more and more difficult every day." Here the humor touches upon buffoonery, just as it does in the passage where Hjalmar expatiates on the low estate to which his father has fallen, "he, who had shot nine bears, and who was descended from two lieutenant-colonels—one after the other of course"—all of which Gregers takes in with the same jaundiced serious mien. Some of the humorous exhibitions of Hjalmar, it is true, are not without a sharp sting of pathos, as when, having promised Hedwig in his thoughtless, impulsive way that he would stuff his pockets with dainties from the banquet table, he returns to regale the child with the French menu card and a description of the delicacies that had tickled his palate. Naturally he has to pay the price for having indulged his generous imagination: Hedwig bursts into tears. Here we are in danger of mistaking humor for satire, if, putting ourselves in place of

the child, we revolt against Hjalmar's egotism. However, we have but to follow the scene through to observe that the tears that glisten in Hedwig's eyes are but an April shower brightening the sunbeams of her smiles all the more a moment later. She is not seriously wounded; she forgets in an instant; the momentary disappointment melts away in a wave of warm affection. Hence we are reassured by seeing the poet's lips half pursed, half smiling, with only a slight twitch at the corners. And though the twitching of the lips increases, the smile never quite departs from the poet's face throughout Hjalmar's trying enactment of the melodrama that has been wished upon him. Given a character like Hjalmar's, the predicament in which he finds himself, thanks to Gregers' meddling, is so real, that curiosity as to how he will extricate himself from the idealist's clutches is even accompanied by a faint undercurrent of sympathy.

Not so in the case of Gregers. When focused upon the quack, the smile of the poet's eyes becomes a leer and his lips are distorted into a malicious grin. Gregers only drew the poet's scorn, whereas he might have been made an object of pity. For he also has a hunger for melodrama, the hunger of an empty, drab life for a touch of color. In forcing himself upon the presence of husband and wife when he expects the grand moment of the reconciliation to be due, in clinging to Hjalmar's heels as a watchdog ever after, he reveals this craving. But he lacks the virtuosity of talent to appease this hunger by his own means, and being without it, he consumes himself in self-hatred.

Too much of Ibsen's own self—the self that he smarted under all his days—has gone into the making of Gregers to permit of the tolerant, good-natured elaboration accorded to Hjalmar. Gregers is Ibsen's self-projection in caricature.

This holds true even of minor touches. We have it on good authority, for instance, that Ibsen also took pride in his powers of self-help. It is strikingly evident in fundamentals. "Self-anatomy" was the method by which the author of "The Pretenders" studied Gregers' inferiority complex. The same source provided him with his knowledge of and his aversion for Gregers' sickly conscience,—the malady that Julian had felt as a slow poison, the malady from which Solness suffers many years later and to which Hilda Wangel's ideal of a robust conscience is set in effective contrast. That this aversion haunted Ibsen to the end of his days is instanced by his last letter to Georg Brandes. Despite the great critic's engrossing pen-portrait of the art historian, Julius Lange, Ibsen confesses himself as quite unable to warm to the latter's personality. He insists, he still finds the man "rather irritating—with his excessively tender conscience." [3]

But the cruel sport of self-caricature reaches its height in Ibsen's making Gregers the spokesman of the claim of the ideal. Gregers' idealism can not be honored with the name of a mission; it is a hobby. In all seriousness, Gregers must be credited with having read Ibsen's plays and drawn inspiration from them. He has read "Brand" and—aped him by feebly peddling the claim of the ideal among the mountain cottagers. He has read "Pillars of Society" and memorized the lesson that society must be founded on truth and freedom. He has read "A Doll's House," and he has been searching ever since for the true marriage based on absolute sincerity. Without doubt he has taken the lesson of "Ghosts" to heart, for the parallelism between his parents' marriage and that of the Alvings can not have escaped his attention. And he has "An Enemy of the People" still fresh

[3] Dec. 30, 1898.

in mind, for he borrows from it the symbolism of the swamp of deception that poisons life by its stagnant foulness. For seventeen years Gregers had dwelt in the Höjdal mountains. Seventeen years had passed between the publication of "Brand" and the time when Gregers loomed up before Ibsen's artist's eye. A mere coincidence perhaps; but possibly it amused the poet to fancy that the neurotic Gregers caught the germ of "acute rectitudinitis" [4] from the first edition of "Brand," and Ibsen's later works produced the complications—a piece of "tomfoolery" of which Ibsen was quite capable. The other malady from which Gregers suffers, his penchant for hero-worship, for fastening himself as a satellite upon some other person, we know to date back to earlier times; for even in his young days he had revolved around Hjalmar as his star.

Gregers' idealism is the attempt of a superfluous man—one who feels it his destiny to be the thirteenth at table—to dignify his existence by persuading himself that he is of some use in the world. He is an empty vessel, hungering to be filled with the fermenting overflow of a personality; a man of the kind Strindberg would have ranged in his gallery of vampires. He has no personality of his own. Brand's inexorable idealism had been but a corollary of the immanent law of his life: "Be thyself." Apply this maxim as a touchstone to Gregers, and the chasm between the apostle of the ideal and its salesman is seen to yawn.

Gregers could have been rendered pathetic; instead Ibsen chose to turn the shafts of his ridicule upon him. His blind worship of Hjalmar through the successive acts of the melodrama gives rise to mocking laughter. Even Gina, handicapped by the servant's native respect for her betters, is this gentleman's superior in knowledge of human nature. And

[4] Otto Heller's happy translation of "en akut retskaffenhedsfeber."

in his own way, Gregers is as literal as Gina. The principle that life is to be founded on truth, he has learned by rote without grasping its meaning. His hobby at present is the true marriage. He expects to see it consummated by acting the part of officious informer. Quack that he is, he tries to apply truth externally, incapable of realizing that the truth Ibsen postulated must be a leaven pervading a man's whole existence. Of course, his experiment fails; but to make its failure the more grotesquely humiliating Hjalmar has to make the mortifying observation that the marriage which Gregers' detested father is about to enter corresponds to his formula of the true marriage, literally applied.—

The interpretation of Gregers' character is most closely bound up with the symbolism of the play. The symbolism of "The Wild Duck" has taxed the ingenuity of interpreters to the utmost. The wild duck has given the play its title; it is the topic on which a large portion of the dialogue turns; and it is an indispensable factor in the plot, as the motivation of Hedwig's suicide hinges on its presence.

Werle is the first to employ this symbolism in alluding to the fate of Old Ekdal. "There are people in the world," he tells Gregers, "who dive to the bottom the moment they get a couple of slugs in their body, and never come to the surface again." In his mouth the figure is perfectly natural, the experience of his duck-hunt in the marshes still being fresh in his mind; and it fits the Old Man, just as it would have fitted John Gabriel Borkman thirteen years later.

But when Gregers, on his first visit to the Ekdal studio, sees the wounded duck exhibited and hears its strange history, all the details of its story crystallize in his mind into a pattern symbolizing the fate of Hjalmar Ekdal, in accordance with his fixed idea of Hjalmar's character: Hjalmar of the fiery temperament is Werle's wounded victim, he has

dived deep down and bitten himself fast in the marsh of the garret,[5] where he is certain to die unless a clever dog dives after him and forcibly drags him up to the light of truth. Gregers feels it his mission to be this dog; and without our being expressly told so, we are aware how keenly Gregers enjoys the irony of fate that has singled out him, the despoiler's son, for the mission of opening the eyes of his father's victim. The symbolism which he has detected gives to his mission an added dignity; and henceforth his language reflects his esoteric insight, causing the child to remark after his departure: "It seemed to me that he meant something different from what he said—all the time."

A coincidence the next morning bestows on Gregers' mission, as it were, its consecration. He had left the house the night before, his mind agitated by the parallelism between the garret and the sea-bottom to which the wild duck, i.e., Hjalmar, had dived, and he has been unable to think of another thing ever since. Now, in the course of his talk with Hedwig, he hears to his astonishment that she also associated "the whole room and everything in it" with the depths of the sea. She displays a child's natural embarrassment in confessing her secret, as if it were something stupid; but there is nothing strange in her linking the treasured relics of a vanished "flying dutchman"—the big cupboards full of books, the old bureau with drawers and flaps, and the marvelous clock—with the depths of the sea, which her fairy tales must have told her also abound with strange wonders. But upon Gregers her confession must have had the effect of a sign from above. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings—" he must have thought, as the sudden gravity of his rejoinder indicates.

[5] Gregers unwittingly muddles the symbol by thinking of the marsh as poisonous.

*Hedwig.* But that is so stupid.
*Gregers.* You mustn't say that.
*Hedwig.* Oh, yes, for you know it's only a garret.
*Gregers.* (Looks fixedly at her.) Are you so sure of that?
*Hedwig.* (Astonished.) That it's a garret?
*Gregers.* Are you quite certain of it?

Up to this time Gregers had resolved the symbolism of the wild duck in his own mind. But in the course of the scene following, when Hjalmar's emotions are agitated by his account of the pistol and of his invention, and he is presumably in a receptive mood, Gregers attempts to use the symbol of the wild duck as a vehicle for conveying to him the truth about his condition. Hjalmar's quick move in self-defense, the moment he senses the danger to his comfort, frustrates the first attempt; but Gregers succeeds in cornering his victim during their walk together, when Hjalmar's caution had unwisely yielded to his curiosity. Henceforth the symbolism, no longer confined to Gregers' solo part, reappears as a duet, chanted by the two luckless men in unison. In Act IV Hjalmar proclaims himself in Relling's presence "Mr. Werle's wing-broken victim."

What is the purpose of all this symbolism? There can be no doubt that its prime function is to characterize Gregers; for all this symbolism, applied to Hjalmar, is grotesquely inept. There is nothing of the wild duck in his make-up. The more Gregers harps on their fancied likeness, the more vividly does the incongruity between Hjalmar's domestic rabbit-soul and that creature of the wilds impinge upon our consciousness. What this symbolism does is to reveal the mentality of Gregers. We perceive his penchant for wallowing in symbols—his *Geheimniskrämerei* as the Germans would say—to be one of the most conspicuous traits of his character. Symbol-mongering is his favor-

ite way of evading the drab color of matter-of-fact reality. It is his way of achieving the illusion, the stimulating principle of life. It is to him what the garret is to Old Ekdal, his invention to Hjalmar and his demonic nature to Molvik. And we see Ibsen's eyes fixed upon the symbol-monger in grim amusement.

Yet to assert that the wild-duck symbolism was interwoven with the play solely for the purpose of satirizing Gregers would seem to me somewhat rash. It must be remembered that we catch Ibsen's satirical intent in exhibiting the symbol-monger rather late; the choicest bits of satire—among them, what I have called the consecration of Gregers' mission—are so subtle as almost to escape detection. Ibsen obviously delights in laying traps for the reader, in mystifying him as to his intentions, in making him sift the most innocent allusion as to a symbolical meaning lurking underneath. It must have amused him to find critics racking their brains to interpret the symbolism of Ekdal's fowling-piece that would no longer shoot. He was prepared for that sort of thing; he predicted it when he posted his manuscript: "My critics will, at any rate, find several things to squabble about and several things to interpret." He knew his own, not undeserved, reputation for juggling symbols. So we will hardly go wrong in numbering the wild-duck symbolism as among those bits of "tomfoolery" which made the work of writing this play so entertaining to Ibsen. Having once caught Ibsen's sly wink, we relish this symbolism like a subtly compounded sauce imparting to the whole dish an exotic flavor of particular delight for the æsthetic gourmand.

What has been said here about the symbolism of the wild duck does not apply to the transparent symbolism immanent to the situation proper of the play. Relling's comment—

too explicit to be natural—makes its interpretation sufficiently obvious. Those dwellers of the garret, each cherishing his distinct illusion, reflect the need of the average man for a life-lie, an ideal, with which to paint over the grim face of reality. Rob them of their illusions, and their happiness is gone, either for good, or until their ingenuity develops some new make-believe to stay their despair. Gregers' bungling anticipates the conclusion which Rosmer arrives at: "Men cannot be ennobled from without."

The cynic has the last word. Gregers sums up his point of view in the words: "If you are right and I am wrong, then life is not worth living." To which Relling makes answer: "Oh, life would be quite tolerable, after all, if only we could be rid of the confounded duns that keep on pestering us, in our poverty, with the claim of the ideal."

The cynic has the last word. Little perspicacity is needed, however, to see that he serves Ibsen only as a convenient foil for giving the quack his deserts. In his sodden debauchery Relling has ups and downs which raise the mean average of his existence very little—if any—above the plane of the other frequenters of the studio. He is one of the menagerie swept by the poet's range from his high perspective.

Relling, one feels, by the way, is the incarnation of an idea, rather than a living flesh-and-blood person. Ibsen's attempt to humanize him by hinting at his tender passion for Mrs. Sörby must be regarded as distinctly unsuccessful. Moreover, in the scenes that give prominence to Relling, the workmanship of the play shows its seams. Thus in Act IV there is an unmotivated abruptness about Relling's warning to Hjalmar and Gina to leave the child out of their quarrels; and in the last act he shows an unplausible lack of discretion in acquainting the quack with his professional secrets.

"An Enemy of the People" had restated with blunt directness the theme of Ibsen's earlier plays: Life must be built on a foundation of truth and sincerity. It had been explicit with its thesis: All men who live upon a lie ought to be wiped off the face of the earth. "The Wild Duck" examines the status of the average run of men with regard to their capacity for truth and records as its finding that, far from truth affording the foundation on which the life of the average man can thrive, life is so steeped in make-believe that the habit of fostering illusions can better afford cultivating than destroying. On the thesis of "An Enemy of the People" it maintains silence.

"The Wild Duck" marks the severest self-correction administered by Ibsen to the moralist part of his self. His own missionary self comes in for the roughest manhandling. Yet to suppose that his flagellation of himself was also a recantation would be a gross error. When Ibsen scourges the truth-fanatic, it is zeal for truth that guides his hand. As if to remind us that his life had not shifted its goal, he quotes on the eve of "The Wild Duck's" publication that verse in which he had formulated the essence of his striving:

> "At *leve* er krig med trolde
> i hjertets og hjernens hvaelv;
> at *digte*—det er at holde
> dommedag over sig selv." [6]

[6] To live—is to war with fiends That infest the brain and the heart;
To write—is to summon one's self And play the judge's part.

## VI

## ROSMERSHOLM

Back in 1857, when he was still but the obscure manager of a provincial Northern theatre, Ibsen wrote a long essay on Scandinavian folk poetry, in the course of which he developed the thesis that the Germanic peoples were receptive in the fullest sense of the word to only those arts which allowed freest play to the creative imagination of the social group. Generalizing more boldly on the subject of race than we are wont to venture to-day, he marked a sharp line of cleavage between the North and the South European's characteristic attitude toward art. While the Southerner, according to him, is content to let a relatively small number of professional poets and artists supply the people's artistic wants,—the average member of the group contenting himself with a purely receptive and contemplative attitude —the typical Northerner seeks in a work of art primarily a stimulus for exercising his own creative imagination and talent. On this ground Ibsen explains the prominence enjoyed, in the South, by the plastic arts; for "the sculptor and the painter gives a more or less complete whole, a perfectly tangible expression of the idea that was in his mind. To be understood, he requires contemplation rather than real creative activity on the part of the spectator." As to be expected, Ibsen's own art, the drama, is not lost sight of in the shaping of this theory. What applies to painting and sculpture is also true in a large measure, he continues, of dramatic art. "None of these art 'genres' has on that

account become our national property in the most real sense of the word. The Northerner does not feel quite at ease within their limits, where he cannot continue to build on what is given, at his own pleasure. It does not appeal to him to see the creations of his own phantasy, his own conceptions and imaginings, put before him complete, in flesh and blood, by the hand of another; he prefers but an outline sketch of the picture; he would rather put the finishing touches to the work himself, altogether in response to his own needs. Unlike the Southerner, he does not wish the author to point to his work and show up its center; that is rather what he wants to seek for himself, not in any prescribed way, moreover, but by means of that radius which his individual shading of the national character suggests to him as the most direct." [1]

Whatever may have been the potency of this theory in Ibsen's later life, whether or not it consciously guided his efforts to create a new dramatic style, it is a fact, in any case, that he endowed his later dramas to an ever greater degree with that very quality of suggestiveness, that incentive to individual creative activity, which he characterizes, in the essay quoted, as essentially Germanic. Dropping one by one the more or less clumsy expedients—asides, monologues, obviously expository remarks—with which every dramatist had been wont to take the reader into his confidence, Ibsen refrained more and more scrupulously from "showing up the center of his work." That subtle interplay of conscious mind with subconscious impulse in the most highly developed creatures of modern civilization —creatures which the novelist analyzes and explains in the space of volumes—Ibsen rendered in its unbroken organic manifestation, in the brief compass of drama, without inter-

[1] Translated from Samlede Vaerker, 1902; vol. X, pp. 351-2.

pretation or commentary, relying simply upon the medium of natural dialogue, sensitized to an uncanny degree, and occasional pantomime, to convey the logic of the situation, and counting, in addition, upon the creative response of the reader to complete what he finds suggested by the poet only in outline. What constitutes at once the greatest difficulty and the greatest fascination of Ibsen's dramas is the fact that they offer only the raw material, as it were, out of which the reader must fashion characters vivid as life, by his own creative effort. Or, to express it by another no less inadequate figure, instead of setting before us a finished picture to contemplate, Ibsen hands us an exposed photographic negative of the most sensitive quality, and leaves the task of developing and the ultimate result to the individual reader's ability.

In "A Doll's House," in "Ghosts," in "The Wild Duck," this quality is conspicuously present; in "Rosmersholm," the new drama that was completed in the fall of 1886, it reaches its culmination. The demands of "Rosmersholm" upon the reader's creative imagination are so exacting that, while sensing the presence of a masterpiece, he may yet be tempted to despair of it as a master-puzzle.

In "Rosmersholm"—the fruit of the bitter failure of his second attempt, since the days of his voluntary exile, to make his peace with his native Norway—Ibsen has woven so intricate a web of vital contact between individuals that the dialogue reads like a cryptic code of conscious innuendo and half-conscious and unconscious revelation of impulses, fears and wishes unavowed. To understand this code, one must, at every step "build on what is given." Just as in a geometrical problem one's task consists largely of drawing auxiliary lines that presently reveal hitherto unseen

relations between given points of the figure, so the imagination is invited here to pursue one clue after another seemingly leading beyond the scope of the drama, to cross, ultimately, with some other clue by which the imagination is led back to the facts in hand, which are then found to be greatly enriched by the voyage of discovery. We must turn to the concrete analysis of the characters to bear out these general statements.

Rebecca West, the heroine of Viking lineage, stands in the center of the dramatic focus. She is the central sun, as it were, around which Rosmer, her principal partner in the drama, revolves, while Kroll, Brendel, Mortensgaard and Madam Helseth approach, in the order named, the periphery of our circle of vision. Toward the close of the play, however, Rosmer and Rebecca are no longer sun and satellite; they are rather a set of binary stars, revolving around one another and having their axis of revolution somewhere between them,—yet not precisely in the mathematical center but rather closer to the preponderating mass of Rebecca's personality. But it is not the living alone who are involved in the tragic crisis of "Rosmersholm." In a wider sense of the word the dead Beata is one of the characters of the drama, and her character and relation to the principals must be made clear if we would enter intuitively into the lives of Rebecca and Rosmer.

Bit by bit we gather the facts of Beata's unhappy life. She, the emotionally unstable, highly sexed woman, was utterly unsuited to the mild, sensitive, almost sexless Rosmer, and their incompatibility made of their common life a martyrdom. In Beata the lack of sexual satisfaction, complicated, it appears, by an organic ailment, induced paroxysms of passion from which her unresponsive mate

recoiled with a shudder. In the nature of things, these outbursts must have been followed, even at that time, by spells of acute depression.

Such was the situation between husband and wife when Rebecca West was introduced to them, through the good offices of Beata's brother, who felt a warm admiration for the full-blooded, self-possessed young woman from Finmarken. Beata took a liking to her, so intense and sudden, that it suggests a pathological background. In the words of Kroll, "it was adoration—almost idolatry. It developed into—a sort of desperate passion." Rebecca, seeing with the keen eye of the adventuress the advantages of such social connections with the first family of the district, yielded the more readily to Beata's entreaties to become her companion, as Dr. West's death had left her without any responsibilities.

At the same time that Rebecca made herself indispensable to Beata, she brought the impressionable Rosmer completely under her influence.

Thus things went on for an indefinite time during which Rebecca had ample opportunity to observe Beata's hysterical crises and their depressing effect upon Rosmer. As Rebecca afterwards says, he was never quite himself so long as Beata lived. She saw him pining, sickening in the gloom of such a marriage.

Matters took a turn for the worse when Beata learned, after consulting physicians, that she was doomed to be childless. This fact preyed on her mind, and she now lapsed into a state of chronic melancholy. It became a fixed idea with her that she was doomed to an early death, and she would speak of this frequently, as Kroll remarks. She banished flowers from her sight; their colors and odors were unbearable to her. In all probability she dreaded their ex-

citing effect upon the sensuous impulses of her self, now that a morbid spirit of religious austerity had gained the ascendancy in her mind.

Under these conditions, sympathy for the man whose intellectual companion she had become awakened the latent passionateness of Rebecca's nature. She felt herself seized by an urge as irresistible as the savage storms of the Arctic, and with that the wish arose in her mind to put Beata out of the way. She had no scruples to restrain her, for she felt justified in her pagan logic to sacrifice the inferior life for the sake of the finer.

Beata's melancholy put a weapon into her hands. Dr. West's library had contained a work of an advanced positivistic writer who saw the function of marriage only in the rearing of children. Rebecca artfully played the book into Beata's hands, in order to suggest to her or confirm in her the idea that she had no right to the place she occupied at Rosmer's side. We are left in doubt as to the precise sequence of these developments, but this is, after all, a matter of minor moment. No person of sound mind would succumb to the kind of suggestion which Rebecca practiced. All the symptoms which have been mentioned point to a case of progressive mental deterioration in Beata. Rebecca's influence can only have hastened the process which would of itself have completed its cycle unless, perhaps, checked by a competent hand.

After the new idea had taken firm root in Beata's clouded mind, Rebecca went further. Feeling absolutely secure of her hold on Beata, whose one-time passions now burned only with the dusky flame of morbid altruism; feeling that Beata stood hesitating, still shrinking, on the brink of suicide, Rebecca decided to hasten the leap by telling her that Rosmer had found a new mate in herself and that nature

had already given their union the sanction which had been denied Beata. But to lend plausibility to this invention she had to prepare the ground by another, namely the defection of Rosmer from his religious faith. This first communication must have been broached a little more than a month before Beata's suicide. Only when this idea had been securely driven home, she ventured upon the disclosure which was her real objective; and within a few days it had the desired effect: Beata threw herself into the mill-race.

But this act of self-effacement did not proceed without a desperate struggle. Beata wanted to die, her enfeebled will was so completely under the hypnotic domination of Rebecca that she did not venture upon the faintest overt gesture of protest against her triumphant rival; yet the instinct of clinging to life stole a march upon the will to self-effacement. First, by appealing to her brother to use his influence over Rosmer to prop his tottering religious faith. A second time, by making Mortensgaard, Rosmer's powerful and wholly unscrupulous enemy, a party to the secret of Rosmer's and Rebecca's supposed relations. A third time, finally, by hinting to her brother that with Rebecca pregnant by Rosmer her own doom was now definitely sealed,—a confession prompted by the instinctive hope, from the conscious avowal of which she would have shrunk in terror, that Kroll precipitate a crisis by confronting Rosmer with the facts.

Nothing has contributed so much to the misreading of Beata's character as the missive to Mortensgaard. A sweetness nothing short of saintly is revealed, some critics think, by her having shown such wholly loving concern for the future of the guilty pair after her death. The letter has been taken as evidence pointing to her complete sanity, involving a sacrifice of the most deliberate kind. And it is

true, the testimony of the survivors *seems* to point in the same direction.

At the beginning of the action both Rosmer and Kroll are fully convinced that Beata's suicide was a consequence of her insanity. But as soon as Kroll learns that Beata's accusations concerning the breaking down of Rosmer's religious faith are borne out by the facts, this view receives a severe jolt. So Beata knew what she was doing! We are told that the physicians were by no means certain of her insanity. We hear Mortensgaard telling that he saw no evidence of mental derangement in her lucid letter, admitting however, a moment later, that the last part of it was rather confused. There is, finally, the opinion of Madam Helseth, "Clean out of her mind I don't think she was." In vain do we look for any authoritative dictum to decide the case. Like conscientious jurors weighing conflicting evidence, we must arrive at our own verdict.

Madam Helseth was right: Beata was not clean out of her mind. She did not suffer from manic delusions. And a state like hers, hovering so nicely on the border line of what we call sanity and insanity, may well baffle the diagnostic skill of the small-town physician.[2] That her brother, upon learning all at once that her "delusions" were not without a certain basis in fact, should have jumped at the conclusion, she was in her right mind after all, was natural enough, although calm reflection would have convinced him that he would not have dismissed Beata's statements as delusions if evidence of her derangement had not been accumulating for years. As for Rosmer, there is grim irony in the fact that the recasting of a single item of Beata's

[2] While it proves nothing, it is worth observing that Ibsen's earliest sketch for the play refers to Beata as the "melancholy, half-mad wife." F.I.W. 265.

past should cause his whole mental image of her character, formed during years of closest association, to waver and dissolve in utter bewilderment.

The editor of the *Beacon,* a personal stranger to the family, had no reason for suspecting Beata's sanity, since it was impossible for him to know that the only rumors of immoral relations at Rosmersholm were those circulated by Beata herself. He was bound to consider her letter as an attempt to shield her husband, written in perfectly good faith, though betraying a simplicity at which the crafty journalist must have smiled. But can we make his interpretation our own?

No, Beata knew of Mortensgaard's hostility to her husband, based on a personal injury not to be forgiven. Persuading herself with the weak credulity of the hysteric, always skilled in the half-conscious, half-unconscious substitution of motives, that she was writing to protect her husband from future scandal, she was actually taking the surest means of precipitating a scandal. She could not know that Mortensgaard would refrain, through shrewdness, through cowardice, or both, from playing his hand with reckless haste. Neither could she know that Mortensgaard, when the opportunity lay within his grasp a year and a half later, was realist enough to sacrifice even the gratification of vengeance to his will to power.

After sending that letter Beata waited—in mixed dread and hope—for the crash; but the *Beacon* was silent. And Kroll was silent. So, utterly bewildered by the apparent conspiracy of all parties against her, having exhausted her hysteric's ingenuity, she plunged into the mill-race.

One is tempted, finally, to raise the question: Was not the game that Rebecca played fearfully reckless? If Kroll had spoken to Rosmer, would not her whole dark web of

intrigue have collapsed? I scarcely think so. Rebecca, who must have reckoned with such a contingency, would have denied everything, and then these charges would have recoiled upon Beata as so much more evidence of her deepening insanity. Rebecca's denial and her own failure to make herself believed would have further contributed to Beata's bewilderment and despair, so that her suicide would in any case have been a likely occurrence, because her diseased will was unequal to the struggle for survival.—

Far more perplexing than Beata, whose life we reconstruct from scattered remarks dropped by the survivors, is Rebecca West. No other character of Ibsen's creation, in fact, puts such obstacles in the way of vivid intuition. Time and again, after one has fairly caught the elusive meaning of one of her cryptic phrases, the situation yet fails to be lighted up so brightly that one can see her every contour. One is afraid to take his eyes off her, lest the traits just perceived fade again into obscurity.

From act to act our conception of her requires revising, as she removes one veil after another from her past. Even her confessions, themselves but further manifestations of her complex self, do not provide us with a ready-made synthetic picture of her personality; it is we who must ourselves create this synthesis by balancing her every word and her every act against one another, making allowance, moreover, for the subjective bias which attaches to every individual's interpretation of his own actions. An ingenious critic [3] has advanced the startling theory that Rebecca's whole confession as regards her scheming to eliminate Beata was nothing but an out-and-out fiction,—a heroic attempt to restore his sense of innocence to the man she loved, by

[3] Karl Groddeck: Tragödie oder Komödie? Leipzig, 1910.

shouldering the whole blame herself. It was her eavesdropping on Rosmer's conversations with Kroll and Mortensgaard which enabled her, he says, to weave together her plausible story. This theory, utterly mistaken as I believe it to be, has a certain merit none the less to commend it to our attention: In principle its sponsor was quite right in assuming that, just as in real life, the unsupported self-revelations in Ibsen's later plays have the value only of psychological data, not of authoritative interpretations.

As to the fact of her guilt, however, I fail to see that there can be any reasonable doubt. Quite apart from her confession which might, theoretically, be a fiction invented for the purpose of restoring Rosmer's sense of innocence, her conduct betrays, for all its self-mastery, an uneasiness which can not be explained on other grounds. To mention the most striking instances: When Rosmer, in Act I, assures Kroll that they still speak of Beata every day, that they almost feel as if she were still one of the household, and Kroll reveals his amazement, Rebecca seconds Rosmer's sentiments, but she gets up to light the lamp in doing so. The emotion she is bent on concealing by this movement may, it is true, be only her despair over Rosmer's inability to cut loose from the gloomy past. Again, after Kroll has left the house, his cryptic exclamation still ringing in their ears ("Ah—! This too! Beata's words!"), Rebecca's question as to the meaning of Kroll's exclamation may be either the expression of natural curiosity or a cautious feeler to sound Rosmer. That it is the latter, that underneath the studied calm of her manner black clouds of fear on the score of the past are gathering, is revealed, however, by her enigmatical remarks to Madam Helseth, a few moments later, when Rosmer has retired out of earshot:

*Madam Helseth.* Has the Rector gone? What is wrong with him?

*Rebecca.* (Takes up her knitting.) He said he thought there was a heavy storm brewing—

*Madam Helseth.* Dear, how odd! There's not a cloud in the sky this evening.

*Rebecca.* If only he doesn't meet the white horse! I'm afraid we shall soon be hearing something from the bogies now.

It was Beata, we learn later, who used to talk so frequently about the white horse, the family specter of Rosmersholm. It was a vague fear with regard to Beata which brings these words to Rebecca's lips! Madam Helseth, of course, fails to get the drift of her thoughts. She thinks of the white horse only as the bogey of popular superstition, in asking the question, "Do you really think some one is to go soon, Miss?" And Rebecca, her mind engrossed with presentiments of an entirely different nature, replies: "No; why should I think so? But there are many sorts of white horses in this world, Madam Helseth." The idea that the white-horse motif should perhaps have been sounded at the close of the act merely for technical reasons, without its being at the same time an organic upshot of the psychological situation, can be entertained by the Ibsen student only to be dismissed.

The concluding scene of the second act, where Rosmer and Rebecca face each other after Mortensgaard's departure, is charged with intimations of Rebecca's guilt. To discuss them in detail would require a chapter in itself. But the cumulative evidence of Rebecca's eavesdropping; of her exclamation, "Oh, I should never have come to Rosmersholm!"; of her allusion to the ennobling influence of a great sorrow; of her recoiling at Rosmer's pronouncement that it is only innocence which can make life sweet to live;

of her threat to follow the course of Beata rather than reveal the grounds for her inability to marry Rosmer: all this were pitched in a false key, were it meant to express nothing but Rebecca's solicitude to free Rosmer from the ghosts of the past and her despair over the futility of all her efforts. And in the opening scene of the third act, showing Rebecca craftily bent on drawing out the half-garrulous, half-reticent housekeeper on the subject of Beata's letter, the reader can discern Rebecca's consciousness of guilt not only in her cautious questions but in the pauses which punctuate them.

The establishment of Rebecca's guilt is, however, only the first step toward intuitive penetration into her character. The difficulties which we encounter in this process are due to three factors. In the first place, Rebecca's character is unfolded by the retrospective method,—the technique which Ibsen perfected in order to compress the upshot of the character-molding experiences of years into hours. Veil after veil is removed from Rebecca's past, revealing a woman differing fundamentally from her who confesses her crime and her love for Rosmer. In the second place, Rebecca is most adroit in the art of using words for the purpose of concealing her thoughts. The third and greatest difficulty is due to the fact that we are made witnesses, in the three days' space occupied by the action of the play, of an actual development of her character *within that time*. She is one of the few characters whom we see—not simply manifesting her inmost self under the stress of a crisis, but actually changing under our very eyes. It is true, the transformation of Rebecca's self had been in progress for a very long time; she was no longer the desperate plotter who had killed her rival; but at the opening of the action, until near the close of the second act, in fact, her new self is, in great

measure, still *latent*. From that point until the end of Act III it unfolds; and in the course of Act IV she becomes reflectively conscious of the change which had been undermining her old self for a long time, but of which she had largely been unaware until after the crisis of that very morning—the second crisis—which took her completely off her guard.

Our designation of her new self as latent requires explaining. In the last act Rebecca tells Rosmer of the gradual transformation of her wild passion into a tranquil love that has made the great renunciation. At the same time she cries out that Rosmersholm has broken her. Her strength has been sapped, her fearless free-born will has been crippled. She has bent her neck under a law foreign to her nature. Describing her self as it was when she first set foot in Rosmersholm, she says:

> I believe I could have accomplished anything, anything in the world—at that time. For I had still my fearless, free-born will. I knew no scruples—I stood in awe of no human tie. But then began what has broken my will—and cowed me so pitiably for all my days.

And with that she reveals to him the tempestuous desire that had swept her off her feet like an Arctic storm.

Rebecca speaks here as if her will had begun to be broken a long time ago; as if her strength had begun to leave her from the moment that her cold, ambitious designs had to yield to the urge of passion. In a sense she is right. Yet, as we scrutinize her conduct of the morning before, and of the first evening, we have by no means the impression of facing a woman whose will is broken.

On the contrary: it is her aggressive moves which determine the course of events. When Kroll opens the political

discussion, during his first visit, Rosmer longs to tell him of his changed outlook on life, and Rebecca immediately seconds his resolve. But seeing that Rosmer's courage is going to fail him, she prods him with a whisper, which only stiffens his instinctive resistance. Undismayed, she delivers a broad hint, and still Rosmer refuses to commit himself. Finally, she tries openly to force Rosmer's hand, by telling Kroll with an almost brutal show of triumph that she finds the whole situation ridiculous. Even now the crisis might have been indefinitely postponed owing to Ulrik Brendel's arrival, but for the fact that Rosmer is visibly moved by the swaggering vagabond's grandiloquent gesture of sacrifice. Seeing Rosmer's weakest side, his facile enthusiasm, exposed to attack, Rebecca exploits the appeal of the concrete example and achieves in this way what direct moral pressure had failed to accomplish.

And Rebecca goes further. On her own authority she writes to Mortensgaard, asking him for a favor on Rosmer's behalf. She tells Rosmer of the accomplished fact the next morning and hears his unequivocal comment, "Mortensgaard is not a man I care to have anything to do with." In spite of this she sends Mortensgaard up to Rosmer when he comes to thank her for the courtesy of her note. This last measure of hers is, doubtless, prompted as much by defensive caution as by resolute aggressiveness. Convinced as she is that Rosmer will find it difficult to bear up against the hostility of Kroll and his coterie, she wishes to secure for him Mortensgaard's powerful backing, and it was with this in mind that she gave Brendel the note of introduction; but weighing equally with her is the urgent need of putting as quick an end as possible to the conversation going on upstairs at that moment. What she has heard, while eavesdropping, has been of so alarming a

nature as to make her prefer the risk of an open clash to the continuation of Kroll's and Rosmer's dialogue in her absence. It is for this reason that she sends up Mortensgaard at once, giving herself the air of being exceedingly busy. Now, whether considered in its aggressive or defensive phase, it is at any rate the determined action of a strong-willed woman. In all of Rebecca's measures which I have mentioned, and in her eavesdropping as well, we recognize the woman who has the instincts of the leader and is not hampered in the pursuance of her ends by any subtle sense of delicacy.

But the contours of Rebecca's character shift suddenly, as she faces the first great crisis, when Rosmer, jolted out of his sense of innocence by the morning's revelations, asks her to become his wife, so that with her help he may banish the stalking ghosts of the past. After the first involuntary shout of jubilation has slipped from her throat, the two selves within her fight a silent battle terminating with the definite supremacy of her new self which had largely been latent up to this time. Now that it is within her grasp, she renounces the original goal of her scheming. Her refusal of Rosmer's wooing is final. And as he presses her for an explanation, she threatens that sooner than explain she will follow the course of Beata.

Her reason for this threat, puzzling at the time, becomes sufficiently clear as we witness, in the next act, the almost superhuman effort of her confession. But the motive that prompted her renunciation of Rosmer's hand is not even then exposed with any similar degree of clearness.

Was it remorse that checked her shout of jubilation as soon as uttered? To people who have been reared under the influence of a Christian civilization that is the first thought to occur. However, as we shall see, remorse did

not to any visible extent prompt Rebecca's confession of the following day; nor does her conduct before the crisis give the impression that she is a prey to morbid self-reproach. It is not for nothing, moreover, that she is a native of Finmarken, the last Northern stronghold of paganism; that she is physically and spiritually a kinswoman of Hjördis and of those clear-eyed Norsemen whose unromantic logic coined the maxim: "It is idle to reproach oneself for what is past."

The idea of brooding over the irrevocable past was foreign to Rebecca's nature. If I read her aright, her thoughts were wholly concerned with the future that lay ahead as the goal of the joint efforts of herself and the man she loved. What agitates her so terribly about Kroll's and Mortensgaard's disclosures is the fear of how they may affect Rosmer's future. She would instil into Rosmer her own forward-looking view by asking him after their departure: "Listen, Rosmer. If it were in your power to call Beata back—to you—to Rosmersholm—would you do it?" Her own answer, clearly indicated by the form of her question is: No. Rebecca clings to the conviction that Rosmer's emancipation from the shackles of traditional habits of thinking required—hence justified—Beata's death. The same train of thought shows forth clearly in Rebecca's dwelling on the calamity of that marriage to Rosmer, even in her confession, after the crisis of the second act. It is also revealed in her musings, as she converses with Madam Helseth on the morning of the third day. "But after all—don't you think it was a good thing for the Pastor, Madam Helseth?" asks Rebecca, having in mind Beata's death, which had been the general topic of their talk. Madam Helseth, still following up the train of her own last remarks (and betraying, besides, the slightest trace of a lurking distrust of Rebecca) replies: "What, Miss?" And Re-

becca, shrinking from defining her meaning, answers evasively: "That there were no children."

There is Kroll's exclamation at the close of her confession: "Not a word of remorse! Is it possible you feel none?"—and Rebecca's answer, coldly declining to discuss that matter: "Excuse me, Rector Kroll—that is a matter which concerns no one but me."

Granted that criticism must feel its way forward cautiously on this point and that pitfalls are avoided with difficulty, I nevertheless feel that Rebecca's last confession to Rosmer provides a tolerably sure footing for the psychological explorer. She describes the subsiding of her tempestuous passion in the following words:

> All the whirling passions settled down into quiet and silence. Rest descended on my soul—a stillness as on one of our northern bird-cliffs under the midnight sun. . . . It was love that was born in me. The great self-denying love, that is content with life, as we two have lived it together.

Rest and stillness. The stillness of a northern bird-cliff under the midnight sun. Surely a soul that harbors these feelings has no room for the agitation of remorse or the terrors of stalking ghosts!

What if Rosmer had asked her to become his wife, a day or a week before the breaking of the catastrophe? She would have consented, I think, not with a shout of exultation but with a smile of tranquil gladness; for such a desire on his part, spontaneously matured,—far from being any longer the goal of her scheming as originally conceived—would have been accepted now but as a welcome token of his liberation from the stranglehold of the past. To see Rosmer recovering from his neurotic yielding to the domination of memory would have given her deed its ideal vindication.

She would have entered into her new relationship, carefully guarding her secret, withal a harmless one, since it was the secret of a dead, a powerless past—such at least it seemed to her at the time.

It is the irony of fate that Rosmer's plea for their union by marriage, as actually uttered, should convey to Rebecca overwhelming proof of the absolute collapse of her hopes.

She had hoped with untiring patience that the impulse to act would win out ultimately in Rosmer over the dragging force of depressive memories. Just before the catastrophe her hopes were being keyed to a higher pitch; for at last Rosmer was again beginning to take the footpath which he had shunned since Beata's death. From behind the curtain Rebecca watched in breathless tension to see whether Rosmer's courage would also take him across the mill-race. She saw him turn back, as she had seen him do two days before. "They cling to their dead here at Rosmersholm," she moodily remarked.

It must have been with a sinking feeling that she heard Rosmer tell Kroll that Beata was still as one of the household. When Rosmer finally mustered the courage to acquaint the Rector with his intellectual emancipation her hopes rose again, only to be dashed once more by Kroll's fateful exclamation about Beata's words. From that moment she knew that she was engaged in a losing fight. That night she lay awake, a prey to harassing thoughts; while to Rosmer the consciousness of having spoken out at last brought a sleep more deep and refreshing than he had known for many days. After Kroll's and Mortensgaard's revelations Rosmer is more completely at the mercy of the past than ever before, because his sense of innocence has been undermined. He knows that he will never be able to dispel the haunting thoughts of Beata now. And Rebecca shares

with him this dread certainty, hence her anguished plea: "Oh, don't speak of Beata! Don't think of Beata any more! You were just beginning to shake off the hold she has upon you even in the grave."

As he feels himself being overwhelmed by a panic, Rosmer asks Rebecca to become his wife. So this is to be the culmination of Rebecca's dreams of a union of two free souls! Instead of being to him a glad and equal partner in the task of the future, she is to be the guardian standing between his frightened self and the harassing spirits of the past. He craves her as an intoxicant and a narcotic in one. To make his anguished soul forget its torments during brief moments of sensuous passion artificially fanned, to lull him into security by meeting his ever-renewed doubts with ever-renewed assuaging arguments—this is to be her daily task!

We now understand why the high-spirited Rebecca—idealist for all her lack of scruples—*cannot* marry Rosmer. Her dreams are shattered, but as yet she has no clear idea of what the future has in store for her. Dreading confession more than death, because the forfeiting of Rosmer's trust would destroy life's last remnant of value to her, she would rather let matters drift for the nonce, leaving it to time to define their future relations.

Yet the next day she confesses, exposing her sinister past not only to the sensitive Rosmer but also to the ruthless Kroll,—an act which makes the total ruin of her life visibly irrevocable. What has brought about this reversal of her attitude?

To begin with, she had had a day's breathing space in which to think the situation over. Second, the words exchanged between her and Rosmer the next morning cleared her mind of the last vestige of doubt as to the fact that,

his sense of innocence gone, he was a broken man. He has lost all faith in his mission of ennobling mankind. "No cause ever triumphs that has its origin in sin," is the way he interprets his sense of failure. Knowing Rosmer as she did, she saw only one means of restoring his sense of innocence: Not her death, which would only have intensified his sense of guilt,—nothing short of a complete confession on her part could assuage his conscience. But logical reflections alone, as Ibsen well knew, are powerless in themselves. It requires an elemental shock or stimulus to supply the innervation for overcoming the resistance of fundamental instincts.[4] And so here the stimulus which translated thought into action, which brought Rebecca's wavering resolve to crystallization, was supplied by Kroll's new revelations of her past.

Again it is important to observe, how it was not a single revelation on Kroll's part which broke Rebecca's resistance, but a series of counts in the course of their talk. First, on hearing Kroll's positive charge that she had gained her foothold in Rosmersholm through calculated scheming, she is startled by the fearful possibility that this keen and pitiless champion of respectability might come to divine the full extent of her machinations, with the intolerable sequel of his being the one to put Rosmer's thoughts on the track of the truth. But on the heels of this fear, Kroll, without himself suspecting it, delivers the blow which breaks the stays of her clinging instinct of self-preservation. In making her realize that she is the illegitimate daughter of Doctor West, he causes her mind to reel at the thought that, unaware of this tie of blood, she had been her father's own

[4] Rosmer's confession of his emancipation to Kroll is a parallel case. We have another instance of it in Brendel's second appearance, which clinches Rebecca's resolve to prove her sincerity by the gruesome test demanded by Rosmer.

mistress. Staggered by the irony of fate in resurrecting a remote chapter of her past whose real nature she had never suspected, she walks about with clenched hands, muttering: "This can never, never, be true." Her agitation is so uncontrolled that even Kroll half divines its cause.[5] But happily for her, he contents himself with pointing out that what she calls her emancipation has been in large part a superficial, merely intellectual matter whose flimsy texture is shown up the first time it clashes with native instinct.

To many readers it will come as a shock that the panic into which Rebecca is thrown should be due to the realization of having trespassed against the most ancient, the most deeply rooted of social taboos. The fact of this relation remains Rebecca's secret, never confessed. We can but divine it from her manner. She is on the point of opening her confession with the revelation of this secret, when sidetracked by Rosmer's interruption of her preamble: "But, Rebecca, I know all this." Which causes her to change her mind and reply, mastering herself: "Yes, yes—you are right. You know *enough*[6] about this." And once more, on the last night of her life, she tells Rosmer that she has a past, "something different and something more" than she had confessed, but he does not press her for her secret. We have here a signal case of Ibsen's most subtle technique of suggestion. The reader feels that an upheaval of the most

[5] When Rebecca explains her agitation on the ground that she has no wish to be taken for an illegitimate child, Kroll replies: "Indeed! Well, well, let us be satisfied with that explanation—for the present (foreløbig)." By the time Rebecca gets under way with her confession Kroll has fully guessed the truth about her relation to Dr. West; for, as she pauses, in debate with herself, whether to reveal also this chapter of her past, Kroll *looks hard at her,* saying: "Perhaps I had better go." The fact that he keeps his secret to himself adds a gentler touch, by the way, to Kroll's stern physiognomy.

[6] The wide spacing of the Norwegian original, here rendered by italics, unfortunately is omitted in the English version.

elemental sort must separate Rebecca's voluntary confession from her determination of the day before, rather to follow the path of Beata than open her lips. The reader must himself interpret the shock to Rebecca of Kroll's revelation—or miss the causal sequence of her acts. In one of his earlier drafts, incidentally, Ibsen was far more explicit on this point.[7]

Up to the point of this revelation the disabled ship of Rebecca's life had still responded in a measure to her control. Now, after striking this hidden reef, it is a hopeless wreck, utterly beyond saving. Now she is driven to confession, to salvage the one thing that appears to be not past saving: Rosmer's peace of mind. In this act her love for Rosmer reaches the degree of pure altruism, involving as it does a suicide far more complete than physical extinction. For the sake of saving him, she braves the risk of having Rosmer turn his back upon her in horror.

It might be objected that there is something forced in the violence of Rebecca's reaction to Kroll's revelation of her incest. If it is true that remorse plays no part in her confession, how is it conceivable that this item of her past, fated rather than willed, should bring about her collapse? Is Kroll right in his claim that her emancipation had been, after all, only superficial?

The question can not be simply settled by pointing to the classic parallel of Œdipus. The self-mutilation of Œdipus, on learning of his fate, and Jocaste's suicide, were accepted by the ancient Greeks as entirely natural reactions. From their point of view, dominated by the concept of an inexorable fate, guilt wore an impersonal aspect; it was to them an objective reality, a transgression against nature, requiring atonement, without regard for the motives of the luckless

[7] F.I.W. 316-17.

individual who happened to be caught in the toils of fate. But the paganism of the ancients was not the emancipated paganism of Rebecca; and for that matter, we moderns generally do not share the ancients' impersonal conception of guilt. Hence if Ibsen had meant to rely on the traditional force of the incest motif to transmit to us the state of Rebecca's mind, his motivation would appear conventional rather than sound. But I do not think that this is the case.

What affects Rebecca so violently is not only Kroll's revelation as such, but the time and the circumstances under which it is made. Had it come at any other time, it would have given her a shock, no doubt; for even her normal, emancipated self would have reacted with a certain shudder to such a disclosure. She would have learned even then that her emancipation from traditional, inbred emotions has its limits. But it would not have annihilated her. She would have been reconciled to it in time. As it happens, however, this revelation strikes her at a moment when she is completely unnerved by the tension of the past two days. It comes as the last of a series of emotional shocks, at a time when her resistance had already been well-nigh worn away. Hence, while manifestly succumbing to this particular revelation, she collapses in reality under the *cumulative* strain of what she has been enduring.

One more question that requires answering is why Rebecca made Kroll a witness of her confession. The purpose of Kroll's coming had been to urge her to "legalize" her relation to Rosmer for the sake of appearances, and he had relied upon her practical shrewdness to see the force of his arguments and yield to the pressure of such insinuations as the *Official Gazette* had contained that morning. Rebecca feels that it would now no longer be sufficient to restore to

Rosmer his own sense of innocence. With her, his only support about to fail him, she must reinstate him in the eyes of his former friends, by making it clear to Kroll that Rosmer had been an unsuspecting victim of her scheming. Accordingly, it is in the presence of both Kroll and Rosmer that she confesses her crime against Beata and its original motive, her ambition; whereas her passion for Rosmer and the change that stole over her later—the great calm of the soul born out of tranquil love—she delicately screens from Kroll's hostile eye, as irrelevant to the situation, saving it as a farewell gift to her beloved.

Knowing Rebecca as we do now, her willingness in the last act, to face death, presents no problem. By her confession she has already made a sacrifice far more poignant than that of physically ending her broken life. Notwithstanding this, the last act brings the climax of her martyrdom; for more terrible to endure than her unflinching self-exposure was the realization that it had all been in vain. To die was not bitter in itself, when life no longer mattered. But it was bitter to die for the purpose of demonstrating by a physical act what the more heroic act of confessing had been unable to convey to Rosmer—the fact that her love for him had become the law of her being. And withal she must have felt that, far from proving anything by her death, she was but yielding helplessly to the morbid whim of her distracted lover who, in his turn, was succumbing to the gruesome fascination of testing the limit of his power, in accordance with the precedent set by herself. She had described her crime in these words:

As I felt my way forward, at each step I ventured, I seemed to hear something cry out within me: No further! Not a step further! And yet I *could* not stop. I *had* to venture the least little bit further. Only one hair's breadth more. And then one

more—and always one more—and then it happened. That is the way such things come about.

Just so does Rosmer lure Rebecca to her own death.

The appearance of Brendel—in effect an apparition—brings to crystallization the demand that Rosmer had shrunk from formulating and lifts Rebecca to a pitch of exaltation where she becomes the wholly will-less instrument of her lover's morbid fancies. Yearning for her self to be absorbed into his, her personality loses its identity, as it were. Emotionally, she had already effaced herself, by her confession; she is ready to follow this up with physical suicide; but before the consummation of her sacrifice even her intellect yields to his lead. Her words on this point are quite clear:

I am under the power of the Rosmersholm view of life—*now*. What I have sinned—it is fit that I should expiate.

If my interpretation has been correct, it is only at this last moment of crisis that she embraces Rosmer's specifically Christian feeling as to sin and atonement. And even the word "embraces" is, as I feel it, too strong to represent her wholly passive state of mind. To the end she feels Rosmer's view of life as totally foreign to her own native view; but her will having been utterly broken, she submits to its alien jurisdiction, voluntarily, on an "as-if" basis, for her lover's sake. Regarded in this light, her submission to this law forms the culmination of her successive renunciations. And it is at the same time the turning-point of Rosmer's relation to her; for her exaltation in turn reacts upon him, so that he joins her in voluntary death.

Did Rebecca, preparing to go out upon the footbridge alone, have a divination of the resolution forming in Rosmer to follow her? Is her last allusion to the footbridge,

on which Rosmer never dared to set foot, to be taken but as a final gesture of despair, or is there not rather discernible behind it a faint dare, a final pleading that he accompany her? One hardly knows. The scene, set for death, is steeped in a sombre half-light; and already at Brendel's arrival we are as if transported to a mystical twilight zone of the soul where our questions are answered only by mocking echoes.—

We have charted the development of Rebecca's personality. None of the characters that remain to be discussed can compare with her in complexity, hence our sketch of them can afford to be brief. This applies even to Rosmer, whose relation to Beata and Rebecca has already involved considerable mention of the most salient traits of his character.

Rosmer is distinguished neither by ability nor intelligence. What he has to recommend him is the nobility of his instincts. A nature singularly devoid of vigor, Rosmer had passed his childhood under the shadow of his father's tyrannical temperament. He had been conscious of a pressure, never relaxed; and unable to cope with it, he suffered in silence. At the age of forty-three he is still a grave, hypersensitive child, meek and retreating, given to quiet scholarly pursuits, punctiliously regular in his habits, a dreamer of beautiful dreams. His contacts with the outer world have been few, and they have taught him nothing.

His unhappy marriage increased the neurotic tendencies of his disposition. He treated Beata with patient forbearance, for all the silent suffering her existence caused him. When she passed out of his life, he was really glad to be freed of her oppressive presence; but the habit of repression, fostered until it had become second nature to him, barred any frank avowal of his natural feelings to his own

consciousness. The idea of his happiness being bound up with the death of another would have seemed morally wicked to his hypersensitive conscience. But because his lightened state of mind was a fact that could not be explained away, he felt Kroll's avoidance of him as a silent reproach and shrank, in his turn, from taking any steps to clear up the "misunderstanding." As if to make compensation for the relief that he could not help but feel, he took pains conscientiously to recall Beata to his mind and speak of her every day; to placate her spirit, as it were, for his tranquil gladness. His avoidance of the footpath on his daily walks indicates that his cultivation of Beata's memory, far from being a spontaneous craving, was performed in the spirit of a sacrificial rite, as something he owed to her.

In letting his thoughts dwell on Beata, Rosmer is, subconsciously, trying to discharge himself of a debt of gratitude to the deceased. There is not in his conduct, however, the faintest undercurrent of self-reproach. The obsession of guilt fastens upon him only after Kroll's and Mortensgaard's revelations have pictured Beata's death in the new light of an act of sacrifice deliberately committed for his sake.

Rosmer's sense of guilt is, of course, a fiction of his morbidly sensitive conscience. The very avowal which he feels as most incriminating shows up its illusory character. He tells Rebecca, he is now aware that from the first they must have felt for each other "a sweet, secret child-love—desireless, dreamless."

"And it was this close-linked life in and for each other," he continues, "that we took for friendship. No, Rebecca—our bond has been a spiritual marriage—perhaps from the very first. That is why there is guilt on my soul. I had no right to such happiness—it was a sin against Beata."

Rosmer here carries his conscientiousness to a degree where it threatens to be destructive of the higher values of life. Yet it is this extreme sensitiveness on Rosmer's part which assures him of our sympathy despite his weakness. Just because it never occurs to him to measure others by his own standards of guilt and innocence, we see him not as a moralist but as a patient sufferer, too fragile, somehow, to compete in the struggle for survival.

We respect even his naïveté and his illusions. He takes the theatrical phrases of the vagabond genius at their face value and draws inspiration from them. The swagger under which the beggar cloaks his diffidence escapes him entirely. He grants the request for a loan of eight[8] (!) crowns without cracking a smile. Yet his utter lack of guile does not make him ridiculous.

His program of ennobling humanity is that of a visionary. The simple confidence with which he pictures its fulfilment makes it so. We are aware that in talking about his mission he is but yielding to the charm of a beautiful phrase. Yet he does not thereby become an insincere phrase-maker. On the contrary, he rather evokes our pity; for his clinging to this phrase, his craving for joy, his repeated assertions that he, too, wants to try his strength, that for once in a way he intends to take an active part in the battle of life; his hysterical protest: "I will not have my course of life prescribed for me, either by the living or by—any one else,"—what are they but the outcry of a choked and stifled soul, pounding vainly against the black wall that bars it from active contact with light and life!

Rosmer is a profoundly pathetic but scarcely a tragic character. He lacks the strength of will which is the pre-

[8] Brendel wants more than five, but has not the "cheek" to ask for ten.

condition to any conflict which we feel as tragic. Only in the end does his weakness assume an aspect where it might be—I am tempted to say—*mistaken* for courage. His resolve to die with Rebecca makes the conclusion æsthetically and psychologically satisfying.

But this very resolve, while appearing like a "free" act of will, a final emancipation of elemental impulse, actually demonstrates his constitutional inability to escape from the bondage of traditional norms of conduct. For, to go back one step, let us ask: Why is it, at bottom, that Rebecca must die? Surely we feel that Rosmer's craving to put her sincerity to the proof by this fearful test is only a pretext, superimposed by his instinctive feeling that the moral law requires her to atone with her life for the taking of Beata's. Rebecca must die, and Rosmer feels that he cannot face life without her. But even in preparing for this last act of his life he cannot resist the urge to put his voluntary death on a basis where it appears to have the sanction of moral law. To that end he goes through the form of uniting himself with Rebecca in spiritual marriage, so that, they being made one by the sacred tie, he may claim it as his *right* to participate in her atonement.—

In Rector Kroll there is no trace of that neurotic strain which constitutes both Rosmer's fineness and his weakness. Kroll is a typical representative of the old order, strongly conservative, tyrannical, shrewd and unscrupulous within certain limits. There is a sufficient strain of coarseness in his blood to make him enjoy the savage warfare of political speechmaking and journalism.

By no means a complex character, he nevertheless affords an astonishing instance of the vividness with which Ibsen visualized even characters of secondary importance in the drama.

Almost at the outset of the action, Kroll's manner arouses our curiosity. We want to know why he has avoided the Rosmer household since Beata's death. That he has done so intentionally and for a reason which he finds it difficult or painful to state, is apparent from his embarrassment and his awkward excuses in answer to Rebecca's questions.

Their subsequent conversation gives us no clue to the reason; but we observe that after hearing Rebecca speak repeatedly of his deceased sister in terms of affectionate fondness, he expresses his gratitude for these sentiments with a degree of fervor that causes Rebecca to comment on it. Thereafter the conversation drifts into a lighter tone, and Kroll's manner reflects a mood bordering on gayety.

Now, when Rosmer enters and, after cordially greeting Kroll, in his turn hints at a "misunderstanding" now happily removed, Kroll gravely utters the following fluent explanation:

> My presence would always have been reminding you of the years of your unhappiness, and of—the life that ended in the mill-race.

To all appearances, this closes the incident, and Rosmer is touched to find Kroll so considerate of his feelings. Yet, somehow, Kroll's impulsive promise that he will come to see them every single day from now on, seems a trifle more fervent than the situation calls for; and the more we ponder over his explanation, in the light of succeeding developments, the less convincing does it become. This much is clear, certainly: It must have been formulated on the spur of the moment, else there would have been no meaning in his palpable evasion of Rebecca's question; its formulation must have been facilitated, moreover, by the reassuring tone of Rebecca's references to Beata. As we recall the

tenor of Kroll's conversation with Rebecca, we begin to wonder, in fact, whether Kroll did not have a secret suspicion all along of immoral relations at Rosmersholm. But no; his exclamation, "Beata's words!", is too involuntary and too late to warrant the assumption that he could have had some such thought in his mind all the time.

In the second act we learn, however, that the memory of Beata must have been coupled for Kroll with self-reproach. Her death had been due to his neglect to warn Rosmer of her intentions. He had failed to speak out at the time, because warning Rosmer would have involved the distasteful task of acquainting him with her horrid accusations.

It was Kroll's policy to keep silent about painful topics and not to think of them, if possible. It was a natural thing for him, therefore, to avoid Rosmer and Rebecca, since they served to remind him painfully of his culpable neglect and of the ugly accusations which he did his best to banish from his memory.

Now, comparing this explanation of Kroll's avoidance of the Rosmer household with the one he offers, we find that they differ in only one essential: The sentiment of avoidance being in both cases the same, *Kroll has simply transferred his own sentiment to them;* so that he persuades himself in good faith that it is they who are reluctant to see him when in reality it is he who has reason to avoid them.

Here, as time and again, Ibsen has anticipated, in the concrete portrayal of character, facts of the subconscious workings of the mind which have been rediscovered and theoretically formulated by psychologists of our own day

Kroll, whose character and whose relation to Rosmer are modelled, incidentally, on Lorentz Dietrichson and a painful incident that led to the rupture of his friendship with Ibsen,

is conceived as the typical representative of the Conservative forces of his day. His counterpart in the Liberal camp is the editor of the *Beacon*. Mortensgaard possesses certain qualities to such a pronounced degree that they may be called elements of greatness. He knows exactly what he wants and he has himself under complete control in the pursuance of his aims.

Power is his sole ambition, and he will not let any personal feelings get in the way of its attainment. Beata's letter put his self-mastery to the crucial test. In the shape of this letter the enemy's camp supplied him with a weapon which, skillfully used, could deliver a crushing blow against Rosmer and his conservative friends. Why did he not publish it at once? Caution restrained him, the virtue of cowardice. For a marked man like Mortensgaard, the publication of a demented woman's accusations, in the absence of any corroborating evidence, would have been extremely hazardous, as the attack might easily have recoiled upon himself. He guarded his secret, content to wait for an opportunity when he might strike without any risk to himself. This opportunity had arrived when he heard from Rosmer's own lips the partial confirmation of Beata's accusations. But at this juncture he renounces the gratification of his vengeance without any visible struggle. Cold logic tells him that there is more material advantage to be gained in having Rosmer as a powerful ally than as a discredited enemy,—and Mortensgaard sacrifices his feelings to his logic without a quaver.

Mortensgaard marks a sharp deviation from the type of demagogue fixed in Stensgaard ("League of Youth"). The latter, in order to hypnotize the crowd, had to hypnotize himself first by his own phrases; whereas Mortensgaard uses the tricks of his trade without succumbing to them on

his own part. He would be something of a superman if he were endowed with a sense of values, but this is what he lacks. He leaves the values of life to the common herd to determine, at the price of their bowing to his material leadership.

Mortensgaard is conceived as the type of individual who is destined to reach the summit of power in a world where ideal values are no longer reckoned with by the political leaders save as material for propaganda. Ibsen sums up his pessimistic view of the political leadership of the modern age in the prophetic words which he puts into the mouth of Ulrik Brendel:

> Peder Mortensgaard is the lord and leader of the future. Never have I stood in a more august presence. Peder Mortensgaard has the secret of omnipotence. He can do whatever he will. . . . For Peder Mortensgaard is capable of living his life without ideals. And that, do you see—that is just the mighty secret of action and of victory. It is the sum of the whole world's wisdom. Basta!

The fantastic Brendel plays a significant part in the drama. His first appearance is designed to bring out the character contrast between Kroll and Rosmer; to clinch Rosmer's wavering resolve to tell Kroll of his changed outlook on life; to emphasize Rebecca's initiative; and to bring Mortensgaard into touch with Rosmer. His return visit has the double function of suggesting to Rebecca the idea of a death of sacrifice, and of confirming Rosmer's mood of despair by intimating that here is another shipwrecked idealist about to quit the game.

In grouping the characters according to their relation to idealism,—a grouping which the play naturally suggests—we would range at the opposite poles of materialism and

idealism, respectively, Mortensgaard and Rosmer. A medial position between the two would be occupied by Kroll, a materialist by disposition, but made by circumstances of heredity and environment the champion of institutions which society has invested with the sanctity of the ideal. Consciously much closer to Mortensgaard is Rebecca, until she finds herself drawn into the sphere of Rosmer's influence. Brendel, finally, is an idealist of such hybrid composition that neither Rosmer nor Mortensgaard could claim kinship with him, although he moves easily in the spheres of both.

Brendel is of the race of Peer Gynt. As Peer lies on his back, seeing his kaiserdom in the clouds, so Brendel sketches out great thoughts, poems and visions "in the rough" and enjoys the intoxicating thrill of creation without creating anything of a more solid texture than, let us say, the invention of Hjalmar Ekdal. In advance he harvests "applause, gratitude, renown, the laurel-wreath,"—also in his imagination. Now after twenty-five years of self-intoxication he stalks forth with a grand gesture to give his carefully hoarded treasure to the world; to lay his mite upon the altar of emancipation. With a lordly swagger the genial tramp bestows a favor on his old pupil by accepting a loan of twenty crowns, a frock coat and a pair of boots. He goes off to town where, before morning, he lands in the gutter in front of the tavern,—his money spent, his coat in pawn, and his message a soap-bubble that has burst.

Two days later he returns, to say his valedictory to life, still with the same high-and-mighty swagger. He has discovered that the intellectual treasure-chest upon which he had been sitting for so many years now holds nothing but dust; he has learned that the secret of worldly success is

to live without ideals. His first visit was a comic, his second is a tragi-comic intermezzo in the Rosmer-Rebecca tragedy.

If he now made his exit, he would leave the impression as of an eccentric comet crossing the orbit of a constellation of less flimsy texture, before passing into eternal night. But before departing he does something quite unaccountable. In flat contradiction to his pronouncement of a moment ago on the futility of idealism, he turns to Rosmer, to remark: "I gather that my former pupil has a great cause to carry forward to victory." But victory is contingent on one condition, he adds, taking Rebecca by the wrist, namely that she, the seductive lady, the fascinating mermaid, as he now styles her, should gladly go out into the kitchen and hack off her tender, rosy-white little finger,[9] or slice off her incomparably molded left ear.

As Brendel departs, his words and their symbolism ring in Rosmer's and Rebecca's ears. They give the impulse to the precise formulation of the idea around which their thoughts had been circling; namely, that the situation demands the voluntary sacrifice of Rebecca's life. But what can prompt Brendel, we ask, to this oracular pronouncement? If he had had an inkling of the tragedy these two souls were experiencing . . . but that is unthinkable. He doubtless read the insinuations contained in that morning's issue of the *Official Gazette,* but even that does not explain. Turn the matter as we will, in fact, we are unable to find any rational explanation as to why Brendel should warn Rosmer against his fair charmer.[10]

[9] Ibsen here uses a folk-lore motif, found, for example, in the Grimm Brothers' story of The Seven Ravens.

[10] As contrasted with our drama, the third of Ibsen's early drafts treats the same situation in a rationally unimpeachable way, without, however, achieving anything like the ominous tension of the final version. See F.I.W. 324.

I see only one way to account for Brendel's warning. It must be that Ibsen in this scene endows Brendel, who is on the point of ending his life, with the romantic attribute of second sight. For a moment life permits him to transcend the barriers of body and peer into the inmost recesses of the soul. The veil is lifted from his eyes, and he talks as with the authority of inspiration.

Assuming that this is what the poet meant to convey—and what other interpretation is there?—the second Brendel scene is like a conspicuous patch in the delicate fabric of the rest of the drama. Without warning it transports us from the plane of reality to that of romantic mysticism. Having built up a drama on perhaps the subtlest texture of psychological motivation ever conceived, the poet here sacrifices the unity of his style by injecting an incident which is not in keeping with the premises of the drama before us.

. . . . . .

The tragedy of Rebecca West is the immediate content of "Rosmersholm." But this individual tragedy has, in addition, a universal aspect which we can afford to ignore all the less, as the poet went out of his way, in a letter to a Christiania students' debating club, to call attention to it.[11] It could not be overlooked in any case, inasmuch as the dialogue of "Rosmersholm" is visibly weighted by the bur-

[11] Conceding, what these young men had assumed, that "the call to work is undoubtedly distinguishable throughout 'Rosmersholm,'" he continues:

"But the play also deals with the struggle which all serious-minded human beings have to wage with themselves in order to bring their lives into harmony with their convictions.

For the different spiritual functions do not develop evenly and abreast of each other in any one human being. The instinct of intellectual acquisition hurries on from gain to gain. The moral consciousness—what we call conscience is, on the other hand, very conservative. It has its deep roots in traditions and the past generally. Hence the conflict.

But the play is, of course, first and foremost a drama of human beings and human fates."—Letter addressed to Björn Kristensen, Feb. 13, 1887.

den of ideas that raise the Rosmer-Rebecca relation above the plane of a contest merely between two individuals. For Rebecca, we recall, while clearly realizing that it was the ennobling influence of Rosmer which had transformed her, yet attributes her undoing to the collective spirit of the ancestral seat of Rosmersholm. "Rosmersholm has broken me," she says, signifying thereby that Rosmer stood in her mind for the incarnate spirit of centuries of tradition; that Rosmer impressed her less as an individual force than as a product,—as the fine flower of a development that had been maturing in the course of many generations.

And right here we detect a weakness in the composition of the play. We find traces here of the grafting of the philosophical problem upon the psychological drama; for Rosmer, the individual, can not be perfectly reconciled with Rosmer, the bearer of ancestral tradition.

We strike at the root of the discrepancy by asking: Is it true, as Rebecca claims, that Rosmersholm, that abstract impersonal entity, has broken her? Let us fancy Rebecca in intimate association with any one of those ancestors of Rosmer, servants of the church and of the state by turns, whose portraits adorn the walls of the mansion; let us fancy her sharing, for instance, the life of Rosmer's father, the man who was "a martinet at home as well as in his regiment." Is it conceivable that he or any one of his forebears should have broken Rebecca's free-born will by the spiritual force of his personality? I think not. These men, grave and sober, punctilious in the performance of their duty, would have elicited from Rebecca the admiration that one accords to a clean foe, but they would also have whetted her eagerness for combat; her spirit would never have surrendered to one of them.

When Rebecca yielded to Rosmer she did so by virtue of

those very qualities in his make-up which distinguished him from his ancestors,—qualities which made him feel his heritage as an insupportable burden. Only because she found the austere morality of Rosmersholm coupled in the person of Rosmer with that guileless candor, that unaggressive meekness, that childlike gravity and sensitiveness which constituted his temperament, did she yield to his unconscious guidance. It required the fragility, the morbidly introspective bent of his personality—the very qualities which made him the last of his race—to awaken in Rebecca a love that stopped at no sacrifice.

Rosmer is indeed a product but not a representative product of Rosmersholm tradition. Not more so than the spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi was representative of institutional Christianity. Institutions may incidentally produce such rare and fragile flowers; yet from the institution's point of view they are hybrids unable to propagate the type. That Rebecca should confound the individual loveableness of Rosmer with the spirit of his ancestral tradition is psychologically unaccountable. It is here that the poet superposes the speculative drama of ideas upon the psychological drama of individual life, to the detriment of both.

Behind the Rosmer-Rebecca tragedy loom the great outlines of a conflict with the solution of which Ibsen wrestled again and again. Once more the issue of paganism versus Christianity, egoism versus altruism, assertion of self versus renunciation of self, is fought out. In "The Vikings" these antithetical ideals of human conduct are for the first time brought face to face: Hjördis, the pagan superwoman, arrayed in the panoply of her sublime egoism, dashes herself to pieces against the bulwark of Sigurd's Christian altruism. In "Emperor and Galilean" the same conflict between native pagan instinct and the law of Christ, which would sup-

plant it, is consciously envisaged. Julian-Ibsen cries out in despair against this law which, intent upon remaking and ennobling human nature, only succeeds in infecting the pagan will with a slow and deadly poison, sapping its strength without being able to graft its new law of life upon the old stock. In both cases Christianity triumphs over its adversary, but the triumph is only that of the conqueror dragging the slain bodies of his foes behind the wheels of his chariot. Here, in "Rosmersholm," this same struggle is staged again, this time with a modern setting.

Finmarken, the ancient stronghold of paganism, the country which, together with Finland, the Norseman's imagination to this day peoples with witches and demons, is the home of the modern Hjördis, Rebecca West. Her free pagan spirit disciplined by the schooling of modern science, she sets foot in Rosmersholm,[12] the Northern citadel of the Christian faith. From the first she sets out craftily, systematically, to instill her view of life into the pliable Rosmer. She seems to succeed; for, as she had foreseen, his inherited religious beliefs are not proof against the attacks levelled against them by modern science. But then, when victory seemed already assured, her onward march came to a sudden halt. Rosmer's intellectual fortifications had fallen, but Rebecca had failed to reckon sufficiently with that part of his inheritance which, penetrating below the surface of ideas intellectually entertained, had become rooted in his very instincts: the morality of altruism. In Rosmer's Christian conscience Rebecca encountered an obstacle against which her intellectual weapons were of no avail. Unable to make further progress, she gradually slipped back, losing the advantage of the initiative.

And now it became the turn of Christianity, defeated in

[12] A fictitious locality, of course.

its intellectual outer works, but firmly entrenched in the central fastness of its ethics, to score its victories. Through the innate nobility of Rosmer's instincts Rebecca's amoralistic will is weakened, infected and, in the end, utterly broken.

This was a victory different, certainly, from the purely physical victory of Christianity over Hjördis and over Julian. Rebecca not only acknowledges her defeat but submits unresistingly to a law which she feels to the end as foreign to her inmost nature. She tells Rosmer that she is a living proof of the fact that his view of life ennobles.

And yet, this victory of Christianity is, at best, incomplete. The law of sin and expiation is the law of Rebecca's beloved. Her acceptance of it is but the corollary of the fact that she has ceased to exist as a personality independent of her lover. Like its other victims, Christianity has broken her, but in contrast to them, she is a willing victim, marching unbound to the altar of the god who demanded her sacrifice.

It was not Ibsen's intention to stage a mystery play "ad maiorem dei gloriam." What made him return again and again to the typical conflict of paganism versus Christianity was not the desire to see one of them crushed: it was his yearning to effect a reconciliation between them. His own self was torn by their conflict. The day of such a reconciliation Ibsen had felt as about to dawn during those years when Julian's revolt had engrossed his attention, when the whole course of human history had resolved itself for him into a dialectic struggle between two poles of conduct. At that time he fancied the signs of the times to be heralding the advent of a new era of "fulfillment" in which the age-old conflict would yield to harmony; and he had felt it his mission to be the prophet of the Third Empire.

The years passed, and Ibsen became aware that philosophic speculation had served him as a powerful intoxicant. Sober reality still registered no perceptible approach to his Third Empire. Humanity as a whole seemed to be struggling as ineffectually as ever to achieve a synthesis between pagan assertion and Christian renunciation of self. But the problem gave Ibsen no rest. In "Rosmersholm" we again see him grappling with its solution from a different angle of approach. In a manner reminding one of Zola's "Roman Expérimental" he conceives two individuals, each a clean-cut representative of one of two polar types of conduct,—just as a scientist selects chemically pure substances for his experiments. Ibsen brings the two into contact with one another, he lets them react upon one another, in order to see whether their respective individualities can be fused into a new synthetic whole.

In reading the results of this experiment, the mystic and the skeptic in Ibsen come to a parting of the ways. The mystic would fain make himself believe that in the presence of death, the universal solvent, an actual fusion of two souls had occurred; that the barriers of individuation have melted away; that two polar opposites have been reconciled. He pins his faith on a miracle transcending reason.

But the skeptic, who has traced out every step in Rebecca's development on the basis of naturalistic psychology, makes his reservations. He refuses to believe in a mystical fusion of personalities. Rosmer has not been transformed, he points out; it is Rebecca who has made an unconditional surrender.

And the poet, mystic and skeptic in one, having performed his experiment before our eyes, is unwilling and unable to set his hand to an unequivocal report on his findings.

## VII

# THE LADY FROM THE SEA

The lure of the sea pervades this drama as a lyrical mood of longing. Already in the first jottings for "The Lady from the Sea," which date back to 1880, this finds such poignant expression that one is justified in regarding it as one of the original roots out of which the play has grown. Glimpses of Ibsen's personal life substantiate this impression. In 1880 he writes from down in Munich that the most difficult thing for him to become reconciled to is the absence of the sea.[1] This plaint is repeated with greater intensity in 1885, partly for the purpose of bracing himself against the misgivings—justified by subsequent events—which he felt about his proposed visit to Norway.[2] Two years later, in the Danish coast towns of Frederikshavn and Saeby, where he spent the summer, he was wont to stand by the shore, motionless, with arms folded, and watch the play of the tides by the hour; and at the end of the season he told a Copenhagen audience that he had long known the mountains but it was only this summer that he had discovered the sea, adding that he was confident his art would be enriched by the experience. In the year that followed this visit "The Lady from the Sea" was written.

Nine years later the ageing master, domiciled again at last in the Norwegian Capital but unable to acclimatize himself, writes to his old friend, Georg Brandes, and dwells on his

[1] To Hegel, July 16, 1880.
[2] To Hegel, April 25, 1885.

spiritual isolation and his longing for the sea with touching pathos:

> Can you guess what I am dreaming about, and planning, and picturing to myself as something delightful? It is, to make a home for myself near the Sound, between Copenhagen and Elsinore, on some free, open spot, where I can see all the sea-going ships starting on and returning from their long voyages. That I cannot do here. Here all the sounds are closed, in every sense of the word—and all the channels of sympathetic understanding are blocked. Oh, dear Brandes, it is not for nothing that a man lives for twenty-seven years in the wider, emancipated and emancipating spiritual conditions of the great world. Up here, by the fjords, is my native land. But—but—but! Where am I to find my homeland? [3]

This last passage sets into relief the two-fold nature of Ibsen's longing: His craving for the sea as such, for its wide physical horizon; and at the same time his awareness of this longing as but the sensuous counterpart of his yearning for escape from the stifling intellectual atmosphere of a country that feels only the backwash of modern currents of thought. Without feeling its physical attraction lessened on that account, Ibsen is conscious of the sea as a symbol of the intellectual life that he misses.

In our drama the sea exercises a similar twofold fascination upon Ellida; it is at the same time the immediate object of her longing and a sensuous, tangible, concrete symbol of yearnings too vague to be defined. Her discontent with the drab monotony of life, the fascination of the unknown, the yearning for adventure, the lure of danger—these and similar feelings all converge in her mind upon the sea and become fastened to its image. The attachment which the lighthouse-keeper's daughter had always felt for the sea becomes

[3] June 3, 1897.

a nucleus which absorbs into itself every sentiment of protest against the limitations of her actual existence and thereby grows to such proportions as to threaten the existence of which it is an offshoot.

Because of this symbolism "The Lady from the Sea" stands out among Ibsen's works as the classic of romantic longing.

The phenomenon of romantic longing, its description and analysis, is the theme of our play. Contrary to his wont, however, Ibsen does not content himself this time with stating a problem. He formulates, in addition, a solution as clear and definite as can be wished for, and in doing so he escapes the usual tragic ending.

Since the rather theatrical conclusion of "Pillars of Society," this is the first play which does not end with a sharp dissonance. Even in "A Doll's House," "An Enemy of the People" and "The Wild Duck"—the three dramas in which the Comic Spirit guided, or at any rate modified and transformed Ibsen's conception of the situation—the ending offers anything but a peaceful reconciliation with the actualities of life; and in only one later play do we find anything resembling the adjustment of human desires to the scope of the possible (in "Little Eyolf," where Rita finds solace for what is lost in a definite task). In "The Lady from the Sea," however, the harmonious solution is even underscored in somewhat obvious fashion, as if to emphasize the fact that the philosopher, who sees the general problems of mankind reflected in the life of the particular individual, claims an equal share with the poet in the composition of this drama and the formulation of its message.

A conclusion of this kind is so out of keeping with Ibsen's usual outlook on life, that we look for a reason. It is not enough, in the case of an artist so intensely personal as Ib-

sen, merely to suppose that the dramatic plot had shaped itself in his mind in such a way as to lend itself naturally to a conciliatory conclusion. Possibly Ibsen had this conclusion already in mind when he first occupied himself with the theme of this play; possibly that is the very reason why he allowed eight years to elapse between the first draft and the final version: In all that time his mind was not attuned to peace and harmony. Just as the deep gloom of "Rosmersholm" has its roots in the experiences that poisoned his visit to Norway in 1885, so the working out of "The Lady from the Sea" must have been conditioned by an approach to serenity, a glimpse of harmony and happiness on Ibsen's part.

Such was indeed the case. The winter of 1886-7 had brought him compensation in Germany for the lack of sympathetic understanding—real and fancied—on the part of his countrymen; for he experienced the gratification of seeing his most maligned play come into its own. "Ghosts" was at last taken from the index, at least so far as the intellectuals were concerned. It was staged by the brilliant Meiningen Company, and the Duke lavished honors upon its author. A few days later Ibsen attended the first memorable performance in Berlin and heard himself acclaimed by an enthusiastic gathering of German artists and critics as the undisputed literary leader of his time. Little wonder that Ibsen should have somewhat lost his sense of perspective and interpreted all these marks of personal homage as signs of the dawn of a new epoch. He saw the fog of tenacious prejudice lifting, and at once his most sanguine hopes surged to the fore. Once more he persuaded himself that the Third Empire was in the offing. At a banquet in Stockholm in the fall of 1887 he delivered himself of a sweeping confession of faith in the future of humanity:

I believe that an epoch is about to dawn when our political and social concepts will cease to exist in their present forms, and that the two will grow together into a single whole which will embody, for the present, the conditions making for the happiness of mankind. I believe that poetry, philosophy and religion will be fused into a new category and a new vital force, of the nature of which we, of the present generation, can obviously have no adequate notion.

I have been charged on various occasions with being a pessimist. And that is what I am, in so far as I do not believe in the absoluteness of human ideals. But I am at the same time an optimist in so far as I believe fully and steadfastly in the ability of ideals to propagate and to develop. Particularly and specifically do I believe that the ideals of our age, in passing away, are tending toward that which in my drama "Emperor and Galilean" I have tentatively called The Third Empire.

It must have been before the prolonged swell of this wave of hope ebbed away, that Ibsen set himself, in the course of the following year, to the task of elaborating the dramatic plan that he had suffered to lie dormant while four other dramas ripened to completion.

Like "Rosmersholm," however, "The Lady from the Sea" is in the first instance a psychological drama. Once again Ibsen explores the devious workings of subconscious impulse and pursues the actions of his characters to their source. Characters like Oswald Alving and Beata Rosmer had already shown Ibsen's interest in abnormal mental phenomena; here, however, for the first time Ibsen centers the dramatic interest upon a character of pronounced psychopathological leanings. Ellida Wangel, the daughter of a woman who died insane, suffers from a psychosis which makes her state verge upon dissociation of personality and threatens the eventual disintegration of her self.

Readers of a generation ago were apt to criticize this

departure of Ibsen's from the normal as threatening to replace the attitude of general human sympathy with an appeal to morbid curiosity. If to Ibsen's contemporaries this objection may have seemed warranted, there is certainly no ground for it any longer. To-day, thanks to the work of courageous pioneers and able popularizers, even the cultivated layman is no longer a stranger to so-called abnormal mental phenomena. To-day we know that the content of memory is in a perpetual state of flux; that images, constantly detaching themselves from the general mass, emerge from the fringe of consciousness to its focus, displace those of a moment ago and ceaselessly undergo a subtle process of transformation that escapes consciousness. We know, above all, that the phenomena of dissociation, substitution and transformation, which are so apparent as they manifest themselves in psychopathological individuals, are but exaggerations of identical tendencies that are at work constantly in the mind we call normal. And this insight, far from remaining so much abstract conceptual information, has long become an element of intuitive experience to every one who subjects his own behavior to analytical scrutiny. Hence Ellida's state of mind—as yet only a step removed from the normal—raises no barrier against sympathetic penetration into her personality. I scarcely need to add that it does not, nor is it meant to efface the sense of mystery which we feel attaching to Ellida's relation to the Stranger.—

A sleepy Norwegian town, hemmed in by the sheer walls of a fjord, bustling with life only during the brief tourist season of the Northern summer,—this is the spot to which Ellida has been transplanted by her marriage to Doctor Wangel, himself a child of the sleepy town that had been the scene of his childhood play, of his first marriage and of his professional practice; himself rooted to the town by the

tame, domestic nature of his instincts. For this spot the lighthouse-keeper's daughter has exchanged her home by the open sea, to the mystery, the restlessness and the wide horizon of which her imaginative soul had been closely attuned. In the little sleepy town she feels cramped and stifled; its murky air oppresses her, even the water is stale. She is like a wild duck, caged, among sundry domestic fowls, within the walls of a garret. Here, where she feels herself a total stranger to all about her, she cannot thrive; she pines away as she realizes her old wild instincts being atrophied one by one, with nothing new growing in their place.

After five years of life among them, the townspeople still refer to her as "the lady from the sea." Her very name—the name of a viking ship possessed of a soul [4]—must have been like the echo of a pagan civilization that had flourished a thousand years ago. Ballested, the jack-of-all-trades—scene-painter, tonsorial artist, dancing-master, musician, tourist guide, porter—who in the course of his eighteen years' sojourn has become completely acclimatized to the mediocrity of the town, feels the mystery emanating from her person; his artist's craving for expression aroused, he daubs his canvas with the picture of a stranded mermaid, dying between the walls of the fjord.

In her very home Ellida has remained a stranger. She has formed no ties there. Her only child died after a brief span of life, and she has kept aloof from Boletta and Hilda, Wangel's two daughters by his former marriage. Boletta looks after the household, while Ellida, now wholly engrossed with her nervous crises and the life of her imagination, sits in her summer cottage day in day out, leaving it only for her daily dip in the stale waters of the fjord.

During the two years that have passed since the death of

[4] The magic vessel of Frithiof the Bold.

the child, Ellida's state of self-absorption has been steadily becoming more alarming. The strain has also told on Doctor Wangel, whose devotion to Ellida is more indulgent than wise. Denied marital intimacy since the time of her pregnancy, yet perceiving the soothing effect of his physical presence upon her, he is at a loss to account for her strange behavior. Unable to cope effectively with the erratic changes of her disposition, sudden and fitful like those of the sea, he allays her nervous crises by the use of drugs, and as for himself, he resorts to alcoholic stimulants to a degree which arouses Boletta's concern. Wangel is intuitively certain that Ellida's morbidness has its roots in a part of her past which, by tacit agreement, has never been discussed between them. What little he knows of her former life leads him to believe, quite mistakenly, that a longing for Arnholm, Boletta's former tutor, may be at the root of her unhappiness. With the kindness and generosity characteristic of his nature, Wangel finally writes to Arnholm and invites him to come, hoping that his presence may bring about a change for the better in Ellida's distracted mind.

Arnholm arrives in the course of the first act. Ellida meets him in the presence of her husband upon her return from her morning dip, but she turns to Wangel with such hungry eagerness that at first she takes no notice of Arnholm whatsoever. The friendly way she greets the visitor, however, when Wangel calls her attention to his presence, clearly shows that her strange behavior is in no way due to the latter's arrival but is symptomatic, as we learn later, of her condition. Ellida extends a glad welcome to the only friend she had known during her life by the sea. His coming brings back the memories of her past with new intensity. She is touched to learn that despite her rejection of his suit before she knew Wangel, he has been faithful to her mem-

ory (as he tells her with a mental reservation); and straightway she feels the urge to ease the burden of her mind by making him a party to the secret of her dreadful obsessions. It is easy to understand why she should have wished to make the prosy and rather stolid head master her confidant in preference to her husband, whose professional training, intelligent sympathy and intimate knowledge of her habits fitted him so much better for this rôle: Having observed silence against her husband at the outset, the mere drift of time raised up a barrier against eventual confession which grew more difficult to surmount with every day that passed by. It is Arnholm's coming, therefore, which breaks the insufferable tension. She begins to speak.

Her confession, scarcely begun, is interrupted by Lyngstrand's call. Then, by one of the remarkable coincidences to which Ibsen had recourse in this play, the dread past is made to rise up before Ellida with the vividness of life. Lyngstrand's account of the first mate of his vessel, the "American," who pores over a pack of Norwegian newspapers, suddenly crunches the paper in his hand, tears it to shreds and mutters in excellent Norwegian the vow that he will make his sweetheart, now married to another, follow him yet, even though he should have to fetch her as a drowned man from the dark sea; his recital of the shipwreck of his boat in the Channel, in which the mate presumably perished—this impinges upon Ellida with the shock of a physical illness, for she divines from the first that that man of mystery is none other than he whose memory haunts her. Choked with emotion, she is unable after Lyngstrand's departure to continue her confession.

Out on the prospect, however, that same evening, she finds the heart to acquaint her grief-stricken husband with the story of her double life.

Wangel is the first to speak. An incident of that morning, the girls' celebration of their deceased mother's birthday—in effect a hostile demonstration against Ellida—has made him realize that this life cannot continue. Wangel comes forward with a definite proposal which it has cost him a terrible effort to formulate. He concedes that his attempt to transplant Ellida from her native environment has been a complete failure. Now he is resolved to transplant her back to the soil where he found her, and himself along with her, despite what it will cost him. This proof of Wangel's unselfish devotion takes Ellida completely by surprise. Engrossed as she had been with the world of her dreams, she had taken Wangel's relation to her for granted, without giving any thought to the nature of his love for her. As she now suddenly realizes the depth of his devotion and at the same time the futility of his self-sacrificing plan as a remedy for her, she feels she must speak, and, having already that morning mustered the initiative to unlock her breast, she *can* at last surmount the barrier that stood in the way of mutual confidence.

She recounts to Wangel the story of her first love. She tells him of the first mate of the damaged "American" vessel who used to come and sit with her by the shore and talk of the creatures that people the sea, until like him she felt a kinship with them; of the mysterious thraldom she would feel whenever she was in the presence of this stranger about whose personal life she knew next to nothing; of his murder of the captain from motives which he would not reveal; of their symbolical betrothal by tying their rings together and casting them into the sea, and of his subsequent departure after his pledge to return some day and take her with him; of her sudden awakening from the spell when he was gone; of her letters cancelling the pact and his replies

persistently ignoring her change of heart; of the silence that finally ensued, and of her yielding to Wangel's suit when the past had begun to pale in her memory.

All seemed well; she thought the Stranger had passed out of her life. But about three years ago, when she felt that she was to become a mother, his image had come back to her mind, and since that time it had continued to haunt her. With hallucinatory vividness she sees his profile. The most significant detail of his appearance is a pearl scarfpin which stares at her like the eye of a dead fish. It is not love that she feels for this man, but an uncanny attraction that lures and draws her at the same time that it fills her with horror.

When the child was born, there was superadded to this terror her discovery that its eyes reflected all the changes on the face of the sea—just as his eyes had done; that the eyes of her child are the very eyes that have spelled her fate.

In one further obsession her horror has culminated. It is "the unspeakable," which even now, when she alludes to it, she shrinks from putting into words. She has refused herself to her husband all these years, because the image of the Stranger pursued her even in her husband's embrace. Left to the reader to divine in the play, this symptom is clearly formulated in Ibsen's preliminary studies, where we read: "It is really with him she is living in marriage." [5]

Ellida's confession is substantially complete. By the end of Act II we know all about her that she can tell us. Not that we understand her fully, but we have the essential data enabling us to follow further developments with sympathetic understanding.

Confession has eased Ellida's mind. Through her recital to Wangel the growth of her secondary, parasitic self has

[5] F.I.W. 337; cf. *ibid.*, 332.

received the first active check. The assertion of will involved in defining its sphere is at the same time the first step in the direction of its eventual control. When we meet Ellida again the next afternoon, this time by the pond in the garden, she feels indescribably buoyant and secure. But a moment later we witness the most graphic illustration of the neurotic instability of her emotions: in a trice buoyancy turns into panic. She had come out expecting to meet Wangel. He is not there, and now, suddenly, she cannot remember how he looks. Like a bank of clouds moving across the sun, a stratum of images, associated with her longing for the sea and the fascination of the Stranger, has obliterated the image of Wangel from her mind, and she cannot recover it. She implores Boletta to go and bring Wangel, because only his physical presence can break the spell of the obsession.

Recalling Ellida's strange disregard of Arnholm, upon her first appearance, and the impulsive warmth of her greeting to her husband, we now ascribe it to the same cause.

As she eagerly awaits the arrival of Wangel, to deliver her from the insurgent forces of her mind, the man of mystery comes upon the scene and accosts her. He had stepped ashore from the big English steamer, the sight of which had rekindled all her suppressed longings. Was there a mysterious connection between the sudden change of her mood from happiness and security to panic, and the proximity of the Stranger? Had her sensitive soul been a receiving instrument catching "psychic waves" radiating from his will? Ibsen ponders the question and leaves it open. "Do you believe in such things?" Arnold in the fourth act asks Wangel, who had been pointing out to him features of Ellida's behavior that seemed to defy rational explanation. And Wangel-Ibsen answers: "I neither believe nor disbelieve. I simply do not know. So I suspend my judgment."

The Stranger accosts her with familiarity. She looks at him but does not recognize him. She asks him about his business, and he answers with imperturbable calm, without relinquishing the intimate form of address. Only after he has spoken for the *fourth* time, uttered words which permit of only one meaning, Ellida emits the half-choked outcry: "Ah!—The eyes!—The eyes!"

To his announcement that he has come at last to take her with him, she reacts at once with terror and revulsion. She threatens to call for help. She utters her refusal to follow with hysterical emphasis. "No, no, no! I will not, I say! I neither can, nor will!" And in the fear that his uncanny power will succeed in hypnotizing her as of old, she would shift the burden of responsibility for her refusal to conditions beyond the range of her volition, by adding in a lower tone, "I dare not, either." Then Wangel enters, and she rushes towards him with the cry: "Oh, Wangel,—save me! Save me—if you can."

For a few moments Ellida drops into the background as the two men, in primitive fashion, each claim her as something belonging to them. Wangel rests his case on the fact of his lawful marriage. The Stranger counters by asserting the priority of his own contract of betrothal as a binding moral obligation. Ellida, still a prey to abject terror, repeats: "But I refuse, I tell you! Never in this world will I have anything more to do with you! Do not look at me like that! I will not, I tell you."

Then the Stranger drops a word which acts upon Ellida with magic potency. He has no intentions of taking her by force: "If Ellida is to be mine, she must come of her own free will." "My own free will," she repeats to herself, —and at once the old lure begins to reassert itself through her terror.

The contrast between the two men is sharply drawn. The more Wangel entrenches himself in the rigid conventionalism of herd standards, the more strongly does the Stranger's moral superiority make itself felt. He had countered at first with the same weapons that Wangel employed, simply through the necessity of meeting him on his own ground. In reality he attached no weight to his claim that she was bound to him by her promise. In his letters to Ellida he had disdained to allude to her vow; save for Wangel he would not have mentioned it now. Conventions, laws and contracts have no meaning for him the moment they cease to be the expression of spontaneous functioning.

However, unless like Ellida we succumb to the spell of a word, we are bound to ask: Does his remark about freedom express the promise that Ellida reads into it? Is it in truth as a free personality that the Stranger asks Ellida to make her choice? Had his stubborn ignoring of both the content of her letters and of her protests during the present encounter been the kind of treatment that one accords to a free equal? Does not his whole conduct rather show that having once experienced the power of his will over her, he stakes his success wholly upon his ability to hypnotize her will into passive acquiescence to his lead? Perceiving rightly enough that any show of outward compulsion or logical appeal could only weaken the elemental force of his hold upon her, he emphasizes her freedom of action in order to neutralize a resistance on her part that threatened to block the effective contact of his naked will with hers.

As Ellida repeats the words, "Of my own free will," and lets them sink into her mind, the Stranger delivers his ultimatum. He will present himself on the morrow, at a fixed hour, to hear her choice, which must irrevocably decide her fate. Having again precisely stated the alternatives be-

tween which she is ostensibly free to choose, he turns the full current of his will upon her, by concluding: "Be ready to start to-morrow night; I will come and fetch you."

The Stranger gone, Ellida can but repeat to herself his talismanic words. Then a chaotic confusion of feelings overwhelms her. For the first time she faces a real choice and suffers the agony of coming to a decision which can never be undone. To-morrow one of the two strands of her life will have to be cut; no more temporizing will be possible. For a moment she would make herself forget that the decision must be her own. "Oh, dear one, faithful one—save me from that man!" she impulsively implores Wangel; but a little later, with an appeal that contains the admission of its own futility, she murmurs softly and trembling: "Oh, Wangel,—save me from myself."

Acts I and II brought a turning-point in Ellida's life. The hallucinatory obsession which for years had been sapping her vitality, undetected by the physician's eye, was exposed to the light of day. The first indispensable step to a possible cure has thereby been taken. By the second major coincidence on which the play hinges, namely the arrival of the Stranger on the day after Lyngstrand's recital of his tale and Ellida's confession to her husband, the crisis is precipitated, in the third act. Ellida must choose between two lives—between her life with Wangel, which she knows, and life with the Stranger, which is wholly problematical and has as the basis of its lure "the demonic attraction of the entirely unknown." [6] The tension is heightened by the definite time limit set for the rendering of her decision. Act IV gives explanations and further complications during the period of suspense. Act V brings the decision.

[6] F.I.W. 338.

After the Stranger's departure Wangel has sought Arnholm, in order to confide his troubles to him, and he does so again the next morning. He tries to view the case with the critical eye of the physician, but his devotion to Ellida and the lack of incisiveness in his make-up render this doubly difficult for him. Real sympathetic insight into the root of her malady combines with an inclination to slip under the spell of a fixed idea himself, as he says in utter discouragement:

> The germ of it all is innate in her. Ellida belongs to the sea-folk; that is the trouble. . . . Have you not noticed that the people who live out by the open sea are like a race apart? They seem almost to live the life of the sea itself. There is the surge of the sea—and its ebb and flow too—both in their thoughts and in their feelings. And they never bear transplantation. . . .

And when he touches upon Ellida's assertion that the eyes of the child were changeable like the sea, the very vehemence of his denial betrays the fact that he is half coming to believe it himself. There is a power of contagion in fixed ideas.

Another matter he broods over is this: Is it true, as Ellida now maintains, that the Stranger's image resumed its hold upon her mind at the very time when he read the notice of her marriage and uttered his vow? Had Wangel not watched the symptoms of her psychic disorder develop gradually during her pregnancy? Did not her physical condition at the time explain, without recourse to any mysterious influences, the emotional crisis which—he cannot deny it—came to a head during the very month when the Stranger's ship foundered? Is this a mere coincidence, or is it the manifestation of an actual telepathic communication of two minds? "Altsaa tegn imod tegn," (literally: sign against

sign, then)—"so the indications may be read either way"—exclaims Arnholm in the very words which Maximos the Mystic addressed to Julian.

Ellida's entrance cuts off further discussion between the two men. A question Wangel asks her, after Arnholm has left them alone, shows how Ellida's memory has been at work pathologically transforming the most recent past. She now maintains that the image which haunted her mind was the exact likeness of the Stranger who accosted her the last evening. She is confused when Wangel points out to her how he did not at all conform to her description. She has forgotten, in fact, that she had failed to recognize him at first. And now she finds that the image of the living man has so thoroughly usurped the place of the image that used to haunt her that she is no longer able even to visualize the latter. Here, certainly, it is no longer a case of "sign against sign"; here is proof positive of a pathological disturbance.

Our skepticism, awakened, leads us to review the scene of Ellida's meeting with the Stranger. Her recognition of his identity had expressed itself in the outcry, "Ah—! The eyes!—The eyes!" But as we recall that she uttered this exclamation only after the content of his words had made it clear that no one but him would dare to address her in such tones, it is by no means certain that she recognized him by his eyes. It was through his eyes that her sailor-lover had hypnotized her will; it was upon his eyes that her obsession was focused; she again beheld the spell of those eyes in the eyes of her child; hence, the moment that recognition of the Stranger flashed upon her, the man's actual presence coalesced with the image that obsessed her and the eyes became the dominating feature in the synthetic impression. This process must have been so rapid that no power on

earth could probably dissuade her from believing that she had recognized the Stranger by his eyes.

And to go back one step further, is it plausible to suppose that Ellida's claims regarding the eyes of her child had any basis in fact? Rather than seriously speak of prenatal influence, as some critics have done, are we not warranted in regarding this idea of hers as another manifestation of a deep-seated obsession; as a logical corollary of her feeling that it is really with him she is living in marriage?

But to return to the present. Besides superposing the present likeness of the Stranger upon her former memory image, Ellida's mind has been active in another way. The Stranger's promise of freedom, to which Wangel had only his legal claim to oppose, has enhanced her feeling of being held captive in an alien environment. She had always suffered from this feeling, but it required a crisis like the present to supply the stimulus for building up a rational case to give it body and support. She finds the materials in the circumstances attendant upon her marriage to Wangel. Impulsive love had not entered into her decision. She was drawn to Wangel by his gentle kindness. The frank way in which he had spoken of the happiness of his first marriage had given her confidence. But the boredom of her existence, the lack of any definite aim and the prospect of knowing herself provided for, had all played a part in her choice. As she now delves into her past, these motives, of which she had been indifferently aware, detach themselves from the homogeneous flow of her consciousness, rise into prominence and, finding a suggestive phrase to attach themselves to, crystallize into a complex. "It was a bargain; he bought me; I sold myself," she says to herself. This formula, once found, is repeated again and again, until the images and feelings associated with it become a definite entity. The phrase is

like a chemical reagent binding discrete elements into a single stable compound.

With this new idea fixed in her mind, Ellida confronts Wangel. She asks him to cancel the bargain and restore her liberty. Wangel is shocked and grieved by this view of their marriage and by her request. He is forced to admit that in her charges,[7] exaggerated by her agitated state of mind, there is a grain of truth; yet by his kindness and patience during these years when she had been his wife only in name, by his resolve of yesterday to transplant himself for her sake, he has proved his love to be something more than mere sensuous desire. At first he does not get the real drift of her request. A conformist to convention by habits and instincts, he thinks of separation and divorce in their legal aspects; but when Ellida makes it clear that she must have her freedom that very day in order to make her choice, he takes alarm. Interpreting her words to mean that her choice is already made in favor of the Stranger, and convinced as he is that it would spell disaster for her to follow him, he feels it his duty in his double capacity of husband and physician to restrain her from taking the rash step. He promises to release her upon the morrow, when this danger will have been averted. In that he is altogether sincere, he has only her welfare in mind. He is right, of course, that in her overwrought state of mind she is incapable of making a sane, deliberate choice. Only he fails to see that it is his refusal to let her choose which from minute to minute makes her will gravitate more strongly in the direction of the Stranger.

[7] Ellida's charge is a typical example of the hysteric's psychology. Ellida stresses the "bargain" so vehemently because, having been unable herself to do the expected part in the give and take of married life, she feels the awareness of her failure as a silent irritation, which, somehow or other, must furnish the animus for a charge against the other party.

Wangel and Ellida have come to an impasse, when the arrival of the two daughters with their companions cuts off further discussion. Wangel prepares them for Ellida's departure by announcing that she will go to her home to-morrow for an indefinite stay. The girls, fully aware of the tension in the household, surmise at once that Ellida is going, never to return. "Going away! Going away from us?" Hilda shouts, revealing by her cry a secret adoration of her stepmother veiled habitually under an air of truculent indifference. Ellida fails to understand until Boletta reproachfully asks: "Have you never seen what Hilda has been thirsting for, day after day? . . . Ever since you came into this house! . . . One word of affection from you." Ellida, peering down vistas which her self-absorption had hindered her from seeing earlier, pauses and answers: "Ah! Should there be a task for me *here!*" On the point of departing, she see opportunities for taking root heretofore wilfully neglected. Perhaps they were open still!

The fourth act, for all its tension, ended with the faintest little rift in the clouds. The fifth act brings the moment of decision.

As the late twilight of the northern summer night gathers, Wangel and Ellida return to the garden in expectation of the Stranger's final call. The tension continues unabated. Wangel, having vainly tried to dissuade Ellida from meeting the Stranger in person, continues to deny her the freedom of choice which she craves. "You can forcibly detain me here against my will," she retorts. "That you can do. But the choice of my innermost soul—my choice of him and not of you,—in case I will and must so choose,—that you cannot prevent."

"In case I will and must so choose . . ." this phrase is significant. As in every choice involving a struggle between

real alternatives the act of deciding is accompanied by a feeling of passive helplessness, painful in proportion to the nicety with which the odds are balanced,—so Ellida is aware of her eventual choice being governed by a compulsion that leaves no room for arbitrary caprice. All that she asks in her craving for freedom is that the inmost law of her nature be unhindered by physical duress in its spontaneous manifestation. It is clear that Wangel's persistence in denying her the right of choice will inevitably prejudice her decision against him even in spite of herself. That the case is not yet prejudged, that the thought of leaving Wangel fills her with keen regret, is clearly shown by the way she reproaches him for having allowed her to neglect all opportunities for strengthening the common ties of their married life. No ties in Wangel's house bind her, she reflects, which could help her now to resist the Stranger's lure. The hearts of the children, so easy to win, as Hilda's outcry showed, are strangers to her. There is not a key in the house for her to give up, not a direction for her to leave behind. Nothing has been done all these years to encourage her to take root. To Wangel's objection, "You yourself willed it so," she retorts: "No, I did not. I had no will one way or the other. I have merely let everything remain as I found it the day I came. It is you—and no one else—who have willed it so."

There is truth in her charge. Wangel, no doubt, meant to do what was best for her, as he says, but his indolent good nature and his lack of incisiveness are responsible for the way matters have drifted. Now at the hour of the crisis he can but repeat the promise, meaningless in the face of the situation: "From to-morrow you shall have your freedom again."

They walk on and return at the time set for the meeting.

The Stranger emerges out of the twilight, pauses at the garden fence and asks the question: "Are you ready to go with me?" And the bells of the ship, heard ringing in the distance, bear the message that the decision brooks no delay.

Now it is for Ellida to choose as she must. The fact that an inner compulsion will decide the issue—a compulsion from which there is no recourse to any metaphysical freedom—is brought home to her again by the Stranger's words: "Promises bind no one: neither man nor woman. If I hold to you persistently, it is because I cannot do otherwise."

The Stranger's fascination grows as he steps over the garden fence and approaches, and her soul responds to the lure of the unknown, which beckons to her from his changeable, glittering eyes as it beckoned from the changeable glittering surface of the sea. The moral superiority of the Stranger waxes from moment to moment as Wangel, shrinking to the philistine's stature, threatens to have him arrested. That gesture leaves the Stranger cold (he carries his revolver to insure his living and dying a free man), and it outrages Ellida's feelings. Her agitation has reached such a pitch that she now declares in the presence of both that Wangel, though able to hold her physically, has not the power to fetter the longings of her mind. It looks as if the Stranger had won. Wangel's reply sounds like the confession of defeat:

"I see it clearly, Ellida! Step by step you are gliding away from me. Your craving for the limitless and the infinite—and for the unattainable—will drive your mind quite out into the darkness at last." And Ellida, with a premonition of that insanity upon her which beclouded her mother's mind, answers: "Oh, yes, yes,—I feel it—like black soundless wings hovering over me."

Then, at the crucial moment, when we feel the definite

inclination of Ellida's will to the side of the Stranger to hang only by a hair, Wangel's compassion for her gives him the courage of despair. Certain as he is now that disaster will equally be her lot, whether he holds her by force or she yields to the Stranger, he stakes all upon a desperate risk which, in no case, can make the situation any worse.

"It shall not come to that," he replies. "There is no other way of deliverance for you; at least I see none. And therefore—therefore—I cancel our bargain on the spot. Now you can choose your own path—in full—full freedom."

These words, falling upon Ellida's ears with the force of a miracle, stagger her belief. Incredulous at first, she questions Wangel's ability to live up to them. As her mind slowly takes in the significance of his decision, the conflict of impulses enters a new phase. Wangel's words have completely neutralized the Stranger's moral advantage. Both men are now meeting her on the same terms. Theoretically they are on a par. (*Actually,* however, Ellida's choice is predetermined by her cancellation of her engagement to the Stranger years before, and by her first instinctive reaction of terror upon recognizing him in the garden.) Now the law of Ellida's will can and must become manifest.

The deep impression his words have made upon Ellida does not escape Wangel. Hope, all but extinct, revives in his breast, as he sees Ellida gaze upon him, for the moment oblivious of the Stranger. Sudden hope inspires him to turn theoretical equality into a positive advantage. "Your thoughts," he continues, "went in other directions. But now,—you are set wholly free from me and mine. Now your own true life can return to its—its right groove again. For now you can choose in freedom; and on your own responsibility."

These words, apparently a repetition of his declaration

to set her free, in reality throw a new element into the balance that turns the scales decisively in his favor. By adding responsibility as a correlate to freedom, Wangel has uttered a new talismanic word which instantly consolidates potent, half-articulate yearnings of Ellida's soul into a rigid complex,—a complex this time making for health and reintegration of personality. "In freedom and on my own responsibility," Ellida exclaims, clasping her head with her hands and gazing fixedly towards Wangel. "Responsibility! This—this transforms everything." Attaching a much more definite and concrete content to the word responsibility than Wangel had been conscious of putting into it, Ellida anchors to it all those desires for a life built on mutual bonds and common tasks which Hilda's outcry had awakened in her. These very desires, voiced an hour earlier as plaintive regrets over opportunities neglected, are now rekindled and fraught with promise of fulfilment.

Once she was free to choose, Ellida's decision was bound to go against the Stranger; but to make her choice a *whole-souled* one in favor of Wangel required the suggestive effect of the word responsibility, by virtue of its power to consolidate the loose insurgent strands of impulse and give them a direction no longer diverging from but now running parallel to the dominant portion of her self.

To the new idea that fills Ellida's mind the Stranger has nothing effective to oppose. As the ship's bells ring for the last time, he summons her to follow. Ellida turns to him, and with a voice in which no quaver of indecision is audible she announces her choice: She will never leave Wangel. The Stranger's power over her is completely gone. The lure of the unknown no longer haunts her, now that a free life filled with definite tasks and interests awaits her. Self-possessed and inscrutable, without prolonging a struggle

which he knows to be lost, the Stranger vaults over the fence. "Good-by, Mrs. Wangel," he says in departing. "Henceforth you are nothing but—a bygone shipwreck in my life."

The danger past, Ellida and Wangel can breathe freely once more. To Wangel's question, "And the unknown,—it fascinates you no longer?" Ellida answers: "It neither fascinates nor frightens me. I could have seen into it—gone into it—if I had wished to. I was free to choose it; and therefore I was able to reject it." We can picture the poet-philosopher penning these lines with an ironic smile on the short-livedness of human memory. How many minutes can have elapsed since Ellida, a prey to anguish, knew that the decision she was about to make would be determined by an inexorable inner necessity? What an altered appearance the situation has already taken on in retrospect for Ellida to be able to say so naïvely: "I could have gone into it, if I had wished to. I was free to choose it!" These two contradictory attitudes of before and after embody the essence of all that philosophers have thought and written on the problem of freedom and determinism.

In the great gallery of Ibsen's women characters there is scarcely another who can vie with Ellida for warmth of color and directness of sensuous appeal. Wholly a child of nature, she is more closely attuned to its rhythm than we reflective creatures whose lives are centered on definite purposes. Ellida thinks and conceives in images, in visible pictures. She is one of those rare, intensely poetical natures whose every thought is a metaphor, whose every word is a fragrant blossom of the imagination. What in the thinking process of us more practical creatures is a mere pale, scarcely perceptible fringe surrounding the logical nucleus of our thought, is to these unconscious poets the very flower

of their mental processes. They write no poems because they lack the self-consciousness and the concentration that are requisite to creative activity, but poetry is their natural language. They can flourish only in a natural and human environment that responds to their special needs. They are not armed to engage, if challenged, in the struggle for survival. To creatures like Ellida their greatest charm is also their greatest danger. They do not understand themselves. They surrender to the lure of images without suspicion of where they may lead. Thus the sea, whose mystery and restlessness Ellida's imagination fastened upon as the most immediate symbol of her vague, romantic longing, was not consciously felt by her as a symbol but rather as a concrete power enthralling her will; thus the mysterious Stranger, whose lure was but a quintessential distillation of the stirring of her wild instincts—the symbol of a symbol—assumed in Ellida's mind superhuman proportions. Knowing even so little as we do about the Stranger, we can be certain that to follow him at this time would have been disastrous for Ellida. She would have been scorched by the fire of his savage will.

The conclusion of "The Lady from the Sea" has been attacked as questionable, quite groundlessly, as I think the above analysis has shown. To be sure, the process of Ellida's reintegration is concentrated in our drama into a briefer space of time than clinical experience will parallel, but the manner in which the sublimation of Ellida's romantic longings is motivated is altogether convincing. This does not, of course, preclude the possibility, ever present in the drama of human life, of new disturbances developing later to threaten the precarious harmony so successfully achieved. What is open to criticism is, rather, the unnecessary underscoring of the solution through the last-moment reappear-

ance of Ballested, forever harping on acclimatization. We resent it as an intrusion of the obvious, shifting the emphasis from the subtle attunement of two souls to the prosy ground of biological theory.

Our study of "The Lady from the Sea" has stressed the predominating note of harmony. As I remarked in the beginning of this chapter, we cannot help but feel that Ibsen conceived Ellida's dilemma and its solution as symbolizing one of the basic problems of human life in general—not in the abstract, of course, but through the medium of his own intimate experience. Like Ellida's, his own life lacked wholeness. Ibsen was aware that his chronic state of irritation, feeding on the inadequacy of the real to the ideal, caused much of his best energy to be dissipated in the merely negative attitude of protest against life. How to utilize this energy and turn it from a drain on his vitality into a positive, creative force; how to work his way toward constructive affirmation of life without yielding to compromise,—that was the problem for which Ibsen temporarily believed himself to have found the solution in the formula of responsibility and freedom.

Not for long, of course. "The Lady from the Sea" is followed by "Hedda Gabler," the most cynically pessimistic drama of Ibsen's creation. Even "The Lady from the Sea," however, blends with its keynote of reconciliation an undercurrent of regret.

On September 24, 1871, Ibsen had written to Georg Brandes: "The whole race is on the wrong track; that is the trouble." That same charge is voiced by Ellida in our drama. "I believe," she tells Arnholm, "that if men had only accustomed themselves from the first to live their lives on the sea—or even in the sea—we should by this time have been far more perfect than we are; both better and hap-

pier." And Arnholm, after questioning the seriousness of her theory, jokingly replies: "Well, who knows? But what's done is done. We have once for all taken the wrong turning and become land animals instead of sea animals. All things considered, it is too late now to rectify the error." Despite the casual appearance of these remarks, I cannot help feeling that to Ibsen, whose thought like Ellida's soared aloft on the wings of imagery, this fanciful speculation had a very definite meaning. Throughout the play the contrast between the life of the land and the life of the sea [8] is felt as a contrast between the life of conventional civilization and the life of freedom. Wangel and the Stranger are pitted against each other as typical representatives of the two kinds of life. In view of the fact that, like Rebecca West, the Stranger hails from Finmarken (his original home was Finland), it is to be more than suspected that the old conflict of Christianity and paganism lurks beneath the new antithesis, —the pagan view of life being associated with the free, and the Christian with the civilized, the conventional trend of our lives. By playing with the idea of a hypothetical choice between life on land and life on the sea, now irrevocably decided in favor of the former, it is as though Ibsen would convey the thought that at some time in the past man's choice of ethical values hung in the balance. It was in his power to choose whether the qualities of the "wild beast,"—shrewdness, agility, ruthlessness, courage—or those of the "domesticated animal,"—kindness, sympathy—were to mark the direction of mankind's ethical trend; whether the "superman" or the Christian was to be the type aimed at in the course of man's development. Perhaps life, dominated by superman ideals, would have been finer, happier,

[8] Reinforced by the analogous contrast between the carp of the pond and the wild fish of the fjord.

more heroic, better all around; but the choice has once for all been decided the other way and can not be recalled. In contrast to the enthusiasm of Nietzsche, his heroic contemporary, Ibsen regretfully but positively dismisses the thought of any fundamental transvaluation of values as a chimera. It is as though Ibsen would say: Man having once for all identified himself with the Christian ideal, the best to be done under existing circumstances is to build on the foundation given, by enriching the Christian sense of responsibility with the intellectual freedom of the pagan. As I feel it, there rings through "The Lady from the Sea" a faint but clear echo of Rosmer's program: "Liberating the minds and purifying the wills."

While the above shows how Ibsen's mind played upon the same situation from a diversity of angles, it cannot obscure the fact that Ibsen's primary interest in the theme of "The Lady from the Sea" lay in the study of the growth of ideas underground. In Ellida we saw fluid masses of psychic content congeal into complexes through the magic contact with a word, a phrase. An idea, having once germinated, throve on the soil of the mind without sustenance from without. We witness a similar process in the case of the sober, unimpeachably normal head master Arnholm. A fixed idea, fostered by his own fancy, raises havoc with Arnholm's heart, just as it did with Ellida's. Wangel's letter of invitation to Arnholm had meant to imply that he believed Ellida to be pining for her old friend's presence. Arnholm had interpreted the allusion as referring to Boletta, who had adored her tutor ten years ago. This thought takes root in the heart of the seasoned bachelor, and he finds himself head over heels in love with her before he has even arrived. Despite the fact that Boletta's manner contains no trace of amorousness, the spell that love has cast over him

grows as he sees her and talks with her; and even when Wangel's reference to the letter opens his eyes to the fact that he had been chasing a will-o'-the-wisp, the idea, once having taken root, is not to be dislodged. He pursues his suit until Boletta yields, not to love, but to the promise of security and a larger, more diversified life than the monotony of her home has to offer.—

Side by side with the main line of the action, in which Ellida, Wangel and the Stranger figure as principals, run two subordinate strands, developing the relations between Arnholm and Boletta, and Lyngstrand, Boletta and Hilda, respectively. The first of these two episodes would threaten, by the amount of space devoted to it, the dramatic unity of the whole, did it not form a certain parallel to the relations between Wangel and Ellida.

Human life repeats itself. The relation of Arnholm and Boletta is strikingly similar to Wangel's first wooing of Ellida, except for the fact that Boletta is not of that same fine and fragile clay as Ellida. And there is one other important difference. Ellida had half-consciously entered into what, at the time of the crisis, she calls a bargain with Wangel; Boletta, after a brief struggle, sells herself with open eyes for a consideration. She is under no illusions. She knows the price she is paying for the opportunity of learning something and seeing something of the world, and of having the comfortable feeling of knowing herself provided for. A moment before Arnholm proposed to her, she had thought it grotesque that a girl could love her former teacher. To be sure, her consent to marry him is not a cold business deal, but the tinge of sentiment does not alter its essential character. His generosity has moved her to gratitude. Unable to accept his kindness without making return, she yields him the only gift which her starved life has to offer. And what

would be the alternative if she refused? She would feel herself growing old in the little, sleepy town, a slave to routine. A few years more, and her thirst for knowledge and expansion would become quiescent. The lover of her dreams would never find his way to her, or else he would come after the bloom of her youth had departed.

Some find edification in the betrothal of Arnholm and Boletta, others see in it the glittering shafts of Ibsen's irony. I feel that rather a note of pathos dominates the situation. There goes a fresh young girl and sells her youth to a middle-aged man, and, all things considered, she is probably making the best of a sad situation! Like Ellida she has to make a choice; but unlike Ellida's, which turns out to be a whole-souled choice in the end, Boletta's is a compromise. We have our misgivings as to what the future may bring, when, the first flush of excitement over, her larger and freer life comes to be taken for granted. Will the contract price for which it was bought be felt then as an irritation? And will Arnholm then hold her to her bond?

The second episode, treating the relations of Lyngstrand to Boletta and Hilda, points both forward and backward in Ibsen's production. Hilda, whose impetuous temperament sets her into sharp relief against her sister, presents the uncertain contours of the girl who is still half a child and already half a woman. Her prurient curiosity about everything suggestive of sex, her animal cruelty, her coquettish vanity, her lust for thrills, her curiously disguised adoration of Ellida, are traits that mark the transition period of adolescence. We meet this same Hilda Wangel again, a number of years later, not as this time a curious but uncomprehending spectator of an acute crisis, but as an active principal in the tragedy of Master-Builder Solness.

In the figure of Lyngstrand Ibsen revives a problem which

had been troubling his conscience since the days when he wrote "Love's Comedy." There the poet Falk had blandly suggested to Swanhild that she give herself to him for a summer and inspire his poetry. Frankly disclaiming any intention of tying her existence permanently to his, he had declared himself ready in advance to discard her the moment he could no longer use her as a source of inspiration. Precisely the same in principle, though stated with less candor, is what Lyngstrand proposes to Boletta. Without reciprocating, he exacts Boletta's promise to think of him while he is gone, because he expects to find stimulation in the thought that in the far north a pretty girl's sentimental dreams are dwelling on his person. And Boletta gives her promise, moved partly by flattery and partly by sentiment, but principally by the hope of extracting something like a proposal of marriage from the poor consumptive;—not that she thinks for a moment of accepting him; but even to be asked would give a touch of romance to her life.[9] Lyngstrand's egotism is fully a match for Falk's; for he tells Hilda (at this time still a gawky flapper) that when the day comes for him to return from the south, master of his art, Boletta will have begun to age, and then presumably it will be Hilda's turn to be sweet and charming, and possibly he will fall in love with her. Lyngstrand has theories about marriage. He thinks it quite possible that a woman should be able to sink her life completely in that of her husband. From her own point of view he can conceive nothing to be more desirable than sweet self-effacement on his behalf. That the converse rule might also apply had not occurred to him. The right of a woman to a personality of

[9] A telling touch is the mixture of superior contempt and condescending pity with which Boletta speaks of Lyngstrand, as soon as she has accepted Arnholm's proposal.

her own making is utterly beyond the scope of his ideas. Lyngstrand is left to harbor his illusions in peace; one does not argue with a man upon whom death has already set his mark. But the problem is not disposed of; it is again touched upon in "The Master-Builder"; and in Ibsen's "epilogue," "When We Dead Awaken," it resurges with an intensity which leaves no doubt as to the fact that once again it is primarily his own self which Ibsen arraigns before the tribunal of justice.

"The Lady from the Sea" falls short, in some respects, of Ibsen's highest achievements. As has been pointed out, the crisis rests upon the questionable underpinning of at least two startling major coincidences. Compared with "Rosmersholm," which represents an extreme of close-knit texture, with each character developed in proportion to his value as a *function* of the dramatic whole, "The Lady from the Sea" lacks the dramatic economy in which Ibsen's best work excels. The action runs along in three different strands, and the prominence enjoyed by the characters that figure in the episodes bears no relation to their value as factors in the main drama.

As an analytical study of human character, on the other hand, "The Lady from the Sea" takes very high rank among Ibsen's work. Equally admirable, from the technical point of view, is the mastery with which the ascending curve of the dramatic tension is guided to the turning-point. And not the least of the qualities which ingratiate "The Lady from the Sea" to Ibsen readers is its by-play of sensuous imagery that lends a peculiarly poetic charm to this drama.

## VIII

## HEDDA GABLER

The strangest thing about this coldest, most impersonal of Ibsen's plays is the fact that it was written the year after he had experienced "the happiest, the most beautiful summer of his whole life."[1] Nor had anything occurred to poison his memories.

The story of the September at Gossensass, where Ibsen, then in his sixty-second year, met a Viennese girl of eighteen, Emilie Bardach, and for once lost the frigid reserve that had long since become second nature to him, needs properly to be linked with "The Master-Builder"—that intensely personal confession of the artist at the threshold of old age who hears youth knocking at the gate. But that experience has left its stamp on "Hedda Gabler" as well.

There is a keen pathos about that short-lived summery warmth irradiating Ibsen's heart before the chill of winter set in. The notes and letters which Ibsen penned to this girl between October 1889 and February 1890, and at long intervals thereafter,[2] are aquiver with emotion, for all their formal reserve. The intensity of the upheaval was unprecedented in Ibsen's life. For a quarter of a century, at any rate, his outward life had been an uninterrupted record of single-minded absorption in his art. Now, for once, life asserted itself, not only independent from his art,

[1] Letter to Emilie Bardach, March 13, 1898.

[2] These letters are found in Georg Brandes' monograph on Ibsen: "Die Literatur," vol. 32. Berlin, Bard Marquardt und Co.

but hostile to it. Returning to Munich, he finds himself unable to work. Try as he will to concentrate his imagination upon a new dramatic poem, it will not be controlled. Ever and again it slips its leash and steals back to the mountain valley to dwell on memories.

In the long run this state was bound to become insupportable to a mind that could not exist without being creatively active. Deprived of her personal presence, he could not endure the substitute of mere letters. In February Ibsen took the first step to recover his mastery of himself, by terminating the correspondence. It was a matter of conscience to him, as he phrased it, to put an end to the exchange of letters. She respected his wish.

In the course of that year Ibsen wrote "Hedda Gabler." He wrote it with a coldness, a detachment, an objectivity found neither before nor after in his writings. He refrained from interweaving with it any of the typical problems with which he never ceased to wrestle. He wrote it, I feel bold to assert, as an exercise in self-discipline, with a grim determination to focus his mind upon a situation as remote as possible from anything tinged with the warmth of personal experience. In doing so, he resorted, for an artist, to an unprecedented method for regaining his self-control. But is that incredible for an artist who set precedents rather than followed them?

A comparison of the preliminary drafts with the finished version gives the impression as of a distinct effort on Ibsen's part, in the elaboration of his theme, to steel himself against sentiment. The Hedda of the final version is much colder than the character originally projected. The original Hedda is characterized as "the pale, apparently cold beauty.[3] Like the later Hedda she is subject to irrepressible outbursts of

[3] F.I.W. 381.

malice, but she also confesses to getting pleasure out of suffering torments of remorse in consequence.[4] Where the Hedda of our play, when love is mentioned, begs Brack to refrain from using that "sticky" word, and sharply denies the presence of any such sentiment in her comradeship with Lövborg, the earlier Hedda answers Lövborg's query by asking: "Do you believe that anything so wonderful exists?" [5] The same chilling tendency is to be noticed with regard to some of the other characters, who are thereby vastly the gainers in subtlety. The occasional grossness of Judge Brack has yielded to a polished smoothness which no longer æsthetically offends. Tesman himself has undergone the most interesting transformation. Conceived originally as "homely in appearance, but honorable, and a gifted, liberal-minded man of science," [6] he was next turned into an obvious accomplice of Hedda's in the destruction of Lövborg's manuscript; [7] whereas in the finished play his complicity in that deed—mental rather than physical—is so deftly concealed that the insincerity lurking under his naïve and comical guise eludes all but the keenest scrutiny.

The objectivity of treatment in "Hedda Gabler" is such that to call the play a tragedy or a comedy falls equally wide of the mark. Tragedy presupposes the dominance of sympathy, comedy the dominance of a mood of elation, if not laughter. We experience neither in sufficiently strong measure to count. In place of sympathy we feel cold curiosity; for laughter we feel contempt. Nor is there the blending of strong emotions that makes tragi-comedy. "Hedda Gabler" is simply a spectacle of life from which we retire with a shock.

[4] F.I.W. 403.
[5] *Ibid.*, 416.
[6] *Ibid.*, 381.
[7] *Ibid.*, 430.

The technical organization of the play is so lucid as to require little comment. The conflict is clearly delineated from the outset, and the grouping of the characters around Hedda, as the central figure, is readily perceived. The situation which forms the basis for the catastrophe is the maladjustment between Hedda and her environment; it is complicated by the unresolved dissonances of Hedda's own nature. By the end of Act I the tension resulting from this maladjustment is exposed from a great variety of angles. The repugnance of the aristocratically reared girl for the petty bourgeois family with which she has become affiliated through marriage; her contemptuous dislike of her husband; her shudder at the thought of approaching motherhood; the toning down of her social expectations, owing to the dubious financial outlook: all this warns of the approach of a crisis.

"Hedda Gabler" is thus what is called a drama of ripe condition. It is not analytical, however, in the sense of "Ghosts" or "Rosmersholm." Whereas in those dramas the crisis is pre-formed in the past, and the exposure of events antedating the dramatic action automatically precipitates the catastrophe, we have nothing of the sort here. In this play the ground is merely prepared by the past for an eventual crisis; the form which this crisis takes, however, and the moment of its appearance are conditioned by the spontaneous actions of Hedda in the space of time occupied by the Drama. In "Hedda Gabler" we witness no "revelations" that by the act of their exposure exert pressure upon the shaping of the future, as does, for instance, Ellida Wangel's confession to her husband. The exposure of Hedda's and Lövborg's past intimacy presents no analogy to Ellida's situation, since it is only to the reader and not

to the participating characters that new facts are thereby brought to light.

What gives this method, however, the stamp of Ibsen's personal genius, is the degree of concentration with which the crisis is brought to a head and followed by the catastrophe. "Hedda Gabler" is the sort of theme which Hauptmann would have developed in a series of intervals extending perhaps over a year's time, like his "Fuhrmann Henschel" or "Rose Bernd." Ibsen completes the cycle of the action in thirty-six hours' time, without a change of setting. For all the extreme naturalism of his psychology, Ibsen resorts without stint to a degree of foreshortening that cuts down the intervals between succeeding stages of development to an almost irreducible minimum.

"Hedda Gabler" is the last of Ibsen's plays to have the dramatic interest centered on a complex woman character. The heroine, as usual, requires the closest kind of study. Her nature, shallow though it is, contrives to harbor so many contradictions that it is no easy matter to form a balanced view of her personality. Abject slavery to convention, coupled with an acute sense of personal freedom; cowardice and courage; crass materialism alongside of a pathetic idealism; candor and dissimulation;—these and other traits are interwoven into the strange pattern of her character. Critics who have missed the vocation of pulpit orator love to inflate their lungs before pronouncing anathema over this demon in human form. Those of another brand would make of Hedda a victim of society.

Of Hedda's development we are given sparse glimpses. Of aristocratic birth and traditions, the daughter of General Gabler, Hedda grew up motherless. At the finishing school the presence of a girl with a head of abundant, wavy flaxen hair irritated her and provoked her to outbursts of cruelty

which had their source in equal measure, perhaps, in envy and in a deep-seated temperamental antipathy; for dearth of abundance, physically and temperamentally, is a characteristic of Hedda's nature. Her later life also we have only in outline sketch. She was a popular ball-room belle, and the horsemanship of the proud beauty in her black habit and feathered hat attracted admiring attention. The only foreign element in her life of sport and social engagements was her clandestine intimacy with the brilliant and dissolute Eilert Lövborg, and this was terminated abruptly when it threatened to grow beyond the confines of conversation.

The old General died, leaving her impecunious. Hedda began to look around for a suitable match. The realization that her youth was slipping by made her uneasy. She had danced herself tired, her day was up—she tells Brack with a candor repented of as soon as uttered. Among the suitors who showed serious intentions the most acceptable seemed Jörgen Tesman, and she chose him.

The six weary months of their wedding trip more than sufficed to make Hedda realize the colossal mistake of her choice. She had entered into the match without any feeling, expecting as a matter of course to find Tesman tolerable. Instead, she found him not only boring but disgustingly ridiculous. Herself a creature of perfect aristocratic breeding, everything about him offended her æsthetic sensibilities. His language with its idiotic "think-of-it's" and "fancy-that's," his constant betrayal of a childish naïveté, his tactless personal attentions to her, suggesting the finesse of a bull-pup, his stout perspiring figure, his very name, Jörgen—everything about him was plebeian and vulgar. Then to come home at last only to be reminded that she was now one of the family; to have to put up with the effusive sentimentality and middle-class manners of his maiden

aunt and be expected to accommodate herself to her level; to be pestered with the unæsthetic discussion of financial worries! And the crowning misery of it all, to feel life of Tesman's life stirring in her body!

Until the afternoon of her first day at home she had at least cherished the illusion that she was the only one to detect the comical quality of Tesman's personality, but Brack disabused her of that idea soon enough.

For a nature like Hedda's the possibilities of realizing happiness in life were very limited. Could she have married a man of wealth and influence and of a personality that did not offend her æsthetic sensibilities, she might have gone through life without ever becoming aware that she had missed anything. As mistress of a salon, surrounded by admirers, the expression of the social talents which she undoubtedly possessed would have been given free play. She would not have had time to be bored; the craving for the power to mold a human destiny might have been diverted into the innocuous channels of petty intrigue. But with that one avenue to happiness closed, it is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive for Hedda a life that would not have exposed the dearth of substance and the absolute poverty of her nature.

For in the last instance the cause of her deadly boredom lay in herself. Hedda was self-centered to a degree that absolutely excluded any vigorously stimulating contact with life in any form. It would be conceivable that a person so completely self-centered as Hedda should be at the same time self-sufficient. That, however, would presuppose an unusually resourceful personality. Now, what characterizes Hedda more than anything else is a complete dearth of inner resources. Hers is a barren nature on which no seed has been able to thrive. The rudiments of sympathetic

imagination, on which the expansion of personality depends, must have become atrophied long before she reached maturity. Her interests are of the very narrowest. Ideas in any form are distasteful to her. To Lövborg's intellectual side she is as coldly indifferent as to Tesman's special problems of research. To her a book is a book, regardless of contents, and boring as such. Her complete lack of imagination is instanced by the naïve question: "Can such a thing not be reproduced? Written over again?" Even the range of her practical interests is pitifully constricted. Not only that she has no taste for responsibilities of any kind and for motherhood particularly, but she responds negatively to anything that reaches beyond the confines of the little sphere in which she has been accustomed to move. In revealing the boredom of her wedding trip to Brack, she lays particular stress on the fact that she had to go for six whole months without meeting a soul that knew anything of her circle or could talk about the things they were interested in. To judge by all signs, including her relation to Lövborg, even her sex life had never been developed beyond the point where desire finds satisfaction in conversation.

Without taking into account Hedda's complete self-centeredness, the atrophy in her of sympathetic imagination and the impoverishment of her inner life, it would be impossible to understand her marriage to Tesman. In taking the step she was completely blind as to what it involved. On a shopping tour she would have exercised more judgment in selecting the merest trifle than she did in the acquisition of a husband. Upon superficial view Tesman seemed to conform tolerably, in the absence of an assorted stock to choose from, to the standard requirements of a husband for a woman of her class. The set in which he was accepted

vouched for his being "a good fellow." He had some means of his own. His ability in his field of research was well thought of by the authorities, and the award of the traveling scholarship gave him prestige and indicated good prospects of rapid professional advancement. Hedda accepted the current estimate of him, and secretly she dreamed about his some day becoming a minister of state and of herself keeping open house on a large scale. What Hedda sought was a conventionally presentable husband; his individuality did not interest her in the slightest degree, she never gave it a thought of her own. The interests and the activities of men generally, except for the ball-room, were a closed world to her. Of the world at large she was as ignorant as a child, and far more indifferent. Without doubt their courtship was an entirely formal affair. Of Tesman's intimate self, when he felt at his ease, Hedda probably got the first glimpse the morning after the wedding.

No single relationship illuminates so many sides of Hedda's nature as her clandestine comradeship with Lövborg. The hardness, the incapacity for sympathetic expansion, the self-centeredness of her nature comes out in the glimpses that we get of this chapter of her past, and it reveals in addition her conventionality, her cowardice and a curious, unsubstantial idealism, manifested in a thin, pseudo-classic cult of beauty.

Hedda did not love Lövborg. She would have loved him had she been capable of either sympathy or genuine passion. As it was, the immediate basis of their comradeship was her curiosity about the forbidden side of life. Her veiled questions, prompted by a desire for thrills, but mistaken for sympathy by Lövborg, were designed to draw him out on the subject of his nightly dissipations, and in this she succeeded. Hedda's sensuality was attenuated to the poin

where suggestive images, conjured up by words, replaced physical passion and afforded a vicarious gratification. But with this prurient curiosity was blended a higher motive for their comradeship—the highest that her impoverished nature was capable of. Physically cold and incapable of love as she was, Hedda nevertheless idealized Lövborg. Because she was a cowardly slave to convention herself, she admired his courage in flying in the face of convention, in living his life to suit himself. She idealized his life of dissipation. It seemed a grand and bold and beautiful thing to her. She pictured him at the bacchanal with vine leaves in his hair; and that image, gleaned from some book about classical antiquity which she may have read in her school days, became to her, in the absence of a richer background, the sole symbol of a beautiful life of free abandon. Years later, when she tampers with his life, she clings with pathetic tenacity, as long as she can, to this last bit of wreckage of her one ideal.

Hedda suffers from the incongruity between her cowardly conventionality and her idealization of reckless abandon. She attempts to unite these two irreconcilable opposites in her own self by persuading herself that there is something courageous in her clandestine comradeship with the dissolute genius

On superficial view, Hedda's low-voiced conversation with Lövborg in the second act may seem to contradict my assertion of her coldness. When there was danger of their friendship developing into something more serious, Hedda threatened Lövborg with her pistol and broke with him. But, as she confesses now, the fact that she did not dare to shoot him was not her worst act of cowardice that evening. More cowardly, as the context compels us to infer, was her refusal to yield to his passion. The contradiction, however,

is more apparent than real. Her longing for the courage to do the unconventional thing and plunge into the life of dissipation is quite intelligible even in the absence of physical passion. Had she yielded to him, her gratification would have consisted in the consciousness of doing something wickedly unconventional, hence beautiful. Hedda's relation to Brack also substantiates her physical coldness. She knows perfectly well what sort of triangle the Judge has set his heart upon, hence there lies for her a peculiarly racy zest in the thought of maneuvering the situation so dexterously as to keep it within the limits of Platonic vice.

It is difficult to keep free of the idea that there should not have been an element of genuine sympathy—of imaginative projection into his point of view—in Hedda's relation to Lövborg. As one keeps in mind the fact, furtively revealed in momentary glimpses, that Lövborg was the one individual who stood to Hedda for an ideal, one is tempted to attribute her challenge of his manhood, by sending him to Brack's party, in some measure to sympathy. It looks as if she had done it in part for his sake, to cleanse him of a stain that sullied his life. For her feeling there is something unæsthetic about the reclaimed rake, the total abstainer. He is no longer a free man. So it looks as though an essentially unselfish desire to restore his freedom to him were blended with her other motives in sending him to the banquet. One need become disabused of that idea, however, by her reaction to Brack's preliminary report of his suicide. "At last a deed worth doing," she exclaims in a clear tone of voice, and when Tesman and Thea have retired to the other room she reiterates the same idea:

*Hedda.* (In a low voice.) Oh, what liberation there is in this act of Eilert Lövborg's.

*Brack.* Liberation, Mrs. Hedda? Yes, for him it is liberation true enough.

*Hedda.* I mean for me. It gives me a sense of freedom to know that a deed of deliberate courage is still possible in this world,—a deed of spontaneous beauty.

There is no mistaking the meaning of these words, "I mean for me." They show with dazzling clearness that Lövborg's life had significance for her only as a means to the accomplishment of wholly egotistical ends. In using him as a means for bolstering her ideal, and as nothing else, she shows that even in her relation to ideal values she was incapable of transcending the most narrowly possessive attitude. Having gotten from his life the one thrill it could give her—the sensation which she mistakes for an experience—she scrapped the rest that did not personally concern her without the least touch of sentiment. In the same way she might have dashed a precious vase against a cliff, with a beautiful gesture of free abandon. Qualitatively, her feeling for the object would have been the same.—

Our preliminary study of Hedda, based largely on anticipations, permits us now to pass the dramatic action in rapid review. The conflict leading to the catastrophe is in substance the contest of two women striving each to control the destiny of a man. Hedda's is the aggressive rôle, while Thea, lacking the wits to sense her opponent's wiles, is purely on the defensive, and Eilert's is the subordinate part of being the object of the contest. Three times the action rises to a peak, with Hedda scoring three successive triumphs over her rival: The first, gained in the open, when Lövborg goes to Brack's party despite Thea's pleading; the second, a clandestine victory, when Hedda burns the precious manuscript; the third, when Hedda exults in the news

of Lövborg's suicide. But each time her triumph is premature; time after time the fruit of her victories becomes vile and loathsome as she puts it to her mouth; so that at last, overcome with nausea and a sense of futility, she plays her final trump by making a spectacular and horrifying exit.

Hedda drifts into the conflict without plan or purpose. She fastens upon Thea to extract the intimacies of her life with something of the same avid curiosity with which she had listened to Lövborg's confidences. She snatches at a sensation which promises for the time being to make her forget her desperate boredom, and her sporting appetite is whetted by the consideration that she is neatly decoying that same cow-eyed blonde on whom she had longed to vent her malice in her school days. Jealousy and envy do not at first perceptibly enter into her reaction to Thea's disclosures. Her lips curl in contempt as she pictures that wild and wayward genius Lövborg "reclaimed" by the mute appeal of those languishing blue eyes which hide such a depth of—stupidity. It is Thea herself who unsuspectingly sets Hedda's thoughts upon active mischief by disclosing the fact that the shadow of another woman stands in the way of her happiness.

In arranging to have Thea and Lövborg meet at her house, Hedda is actuated by nothing more definite than the idea of amusing herself by a little cruel experimentation. The prospect of watching Lövborg's behavior under two fires and of seeing her rival completely snuffed out by her own superior magnetism, promises a piquant gratification. But she is not counting upon any serious agitation of her own emotions.

Already her preliminary tête-à-tête with Lövborg, however, in the second act, develops beyond the point of playful fencing. A moment before their sitting down with the

album it had made Hedda wince to compare her self-confessed second-rater of a husband with the man she might have married. And now, the moment they are alone, Lövborg exposes the sore of her mismarriage with a blunt sincerity made the more poignant by the uncontrolled ardor of his passion. He tells her that she has thrown herself away; he subjects her to cross-examination. His aggressive manner arouses her own deeper emotions. The desire to keep his passion in check, resentment over the fact that he should have detected the ridiculousness of her situation at a glance, blends now for the first time with a feeling of jealousy against her lucky rival. Lövborg has just told Hedda that she is a coward at heart, when she strikes back with the sarcastic remark that he had now found ample consolation at the Elvsted's for her having failed him. But if her sarcasm betrays jealousy, her quick change to softness a moment later does it even more. There is balm for the charge of cowardice in hearing him apply the epithet "stupid" to her rival:

*Lövborg.* I know what Thea has confided to you.

*Hedda.* And perhaps you have confided to her something about us?

*Lövborg.* Not a word. She is too stupid to understand anything of that sort.

*Hedda.* Stupid?

*Lövborg.* She is stupid about matters of that sort.

*Hedda.* And I am cowardly. (Bends over towards him, without looking him in the face, and says more softly.) But now I will confide something to you.

*Lövborg.* (Eagerly.) Well?

*Hedda.* The fact that I dared not shoot you down—

*Lövborg.* Yes!

*Hedda.* —that was not my most arrant cowardice that evening.

But a moment later, when he would take advantage of her softness to return to the forbidden "du" of familiar address, she again hardens to steel.

Then Thea arrives, and it takes Hedda but a glance to see that it is now not herself but her rival who dominates Lövborg's attention. His frank admiration of Thea in her presence piques Hedda, and she vents her feeling by an ambiguous jest. Lövborg feels the challenge and comes to Thea's defense in terms which contain a sharp thrust at Hedda. He stresses the genuineness of Thea's comradeship and of her courage, where the comrade is concerned, emphasizing by implication Hedda's own lack of both. Exasperated by Lövborg's unexpected resistance to her magnetism, Hedda has now only the one idea of bringing him to his knees. Of his refusing to drink she makes an issue, by which she would test her power. But her arts of persuasion, her taunts and jibes, while ruffling his feelings, fail to budge him from his determined abstinence. Her attack already seems completely parried in every quarter, when she spies an unguarded spot and knifes him: By a remark, innocent sounding, but aimed with deadly precision, she destroys his main support, his trust in his comrade.

Hedda has triumphed in the first encounter. No longer heeding Thea's pleadings, Lövborg drains both glasses, stops when Hedda bids him to, and falls in line with her desire that he attend the revel of Brack and his friends.

Three distinct motives contribute to Hedda's sudden change of plan in deciding to send Lövborg to the party. What suggested it to her was the fact that she could thereby do Thea a nasty turn. Then she felt a thrill at the thought that for once in her life she was exercising the power to mold a human destiny. Lastly—a reflection which grew in prominence after the men's departure—her act removed

from him the stigma of being "reclaimed." By making a free man of him once more it spelt the victory of her personal ideal of free abandon.

When Hedda finds herself alone with Thea she wears no mask. Her exultation is frank and unrestrained. By sheer desire to accentuate her contrast to the trembling, broken Thea, she works herself into an almost frenzied state of confidence as to the outcome. "You may doubt him as long as you please; *I* believe in him," she says to Thea, as she stamps her vision of him—the reveller with vine-leaves in his hair, flushed and fearless—upon her rival's mind. There is no shamming about her enthusiasm, any more than about her naïvely honest avowal: "I want for once in my life to have power to mold a human destiny." The wave of emotion takes its course, and arrived at its crest, she bursts into the hysterical confession: "Oh, if you could only understand how poor I am. And fate has made *you* so rich. (Clasps her passionately in her arms.) I think I must burn your hair off, after all."

In this magnificent climax, the conclusion of Act II, we come closer to feeling an elemental contact with Hedda's nature than at any other point of the Drama. In her premature exultation; in her surrender to emotion; in her naïve self-exposure; in her passionate craving for sympathy addressed to the very victim of her treachery; in the very frankness of her envy and her cruelty, there is something infinitely pathetic. But this emotional climax is so sudden and so brief that the note of pity struggles in vain to break through the attitude of cold detachment to which we have become habituated in observing her behavior. Nor does Hedda, moreover, soften to a like degree a second time.

The wan light of early morning finds the two women still together, Thea consumed with anxiety, Hedda fatigued and

yawning, as she awakes from the few hours of sleep she had snatched after a fruitless vigil. The phrase about the vine-leaves, which Hedda repeats, sounds hollow and insincere now that it is not sustained by enthusiasm, and yet Hedda clings to it until forcibly robbed of her illusion.

Tesman is the first to return with his version of the rude reality. Hedda refuses at first to accept it. When Tesman speaks of Lövborg as irreclaimable, she retorts: "I suppose you mean that he has more courage than the rest?" And when he says that the feast turned into an orgy, she asks: "Had he vine-leaves in his hair?" Only when she hears of his long, rambling speech in honor of the woman who inspired him to his work, her illusions are silenced. So it was her rival his thoughts turned to even at the banquet!

And now Brack comes to complete Hedda's disillusionment, by his account of the sordid details of the soirée at Mademoiselle Diana's,—the general scrimmage between ladies and gentlemen, the interference of the police and the marching of Lövborg to the lock-up. "Then he had no vine-leaves in his hair," is Hedda's comment, as she gazes straight before her. Both her aims, it seems, the destruction of her rival and the vindication of her ideal of beauty, have miscarried.

But with Lövborg's call Hedda's hopes revive, and a new destructive idea is added to her aims. As Lövborg declares to Thea that their ways must now part, that she can be of no more service to him, Hedda cannot repress the exultant outcry: "I knew it!"—She has succeeded, after all, in destroying her rival.

And now Thea is fated for the second time to turn Hedda's thoughts into the channel of perverse destructiveness. The violence of the shock which Thea experienced upon hearing Lövborg assert that he had made away with the manuscript

opens Hedda's eyes as to the value of the hostage she holds. It is not a mere book, it is their child, their common offspring, the fruit that will give permanence to their union, even though their ways part hereafter. Thea has spoken a language that Hedda understands. The hated life stirring in her own womb brings it home to her all the more vividly that her attempts to nullify Thea's influence over Lövborg are futile unless their common child is destroyed. From the moment that Hedda's mind fixes upon this thought, Lövborg's work is doomed. As she feeds the manuscript bit by bit to the flames, after Lövborg's departure, she experiences all the sensations of deliberate child-murder. In witnessing her gruesome act, in beholding the lurid glow of the fire upon her drawn features, in catching the sound of her low mutterings, we feel the same ghastly horror that would creep over us in childhood, as we pictured Althea, Meleager's unnatural mother, recommitting to the flames that magic brand with whose last flicker the spirit departed from the wasted form of her son.

But before she carries out her design to complete the annihilation of her rival, Hedda moves to insure at the same time the positive triumph of her own ideal. She hands Lövborg the pistol which had once been pointed at him, and bids him redeem himself by a death in beauty, freely chosen. Undaunted by the grotesque miscarriage of her inspiration the night before, she is borne aloft on a second wave of enthusiasm. For a second time her will is concentrated upon a single vision. Her craving for power is such that by sheer willing she succeeds in achieving the illusion of unlimited power. She cannot afford to have her confidence crossed by any ripple of doubt lest failure result.

She fails nevertheless, as she had failed the first time. Brack's preliminary report of Lövborg's death allows her to

enjoy a short-lived triumph;—she exults naïvely, unguardedly, scouting the most elementary precautions for concealing her hand in his fate. But when the truth comes out, that Lövborg died not in beauty, not in freedom, but by an accidental shot that tore into his bowels, she turns sick with loathing and despair as she utters the words: "Oh, what curse is it that makes everything I touch turn ludicrous and mean?" And that curse continues to pursue her. Not only that her ideal has been grotesquely defiled and parodied in the circumstances of Lövborg's death,—even her grandiose act of vengeance on Thea turns out to be ridiculously futile. That morning she had burned the "child," and before the day is up she must see her husband and Thea pore over a bundle of notes, to restore by a new act of inspiration and many months' labor what she believed herself to have permanently annihilated.

Hedda has lost all along the line. The legend of the one concentrated effort of her life is summed up in the word "futility." We feel that death would mean liberation for her. Yet the shock to our nerves of Hedda's suicide is so sudden and violent that it makes us gasp.

To account for Hedda's suicide there is such a cumulation of motives as can scarcely be grasped in a single act of intuition. There is her terror of the prospect of eking out a miserable life of genteel poverty as the wife of the impossible Jörgen Tesman. There is her dread of motherhood. There is her sense of abject, crushing defeat maneuvered by fate rather than by a rival too stupid to sense the meaning of either the struggle or her victory. There is her feeling of nausea on beholding the one ideal that she could call her own befouled by life and irreparably defiled. There is her exhaustion, psychical and physical, after a supreme effort of will and a night and a day of acute nervous tension.

Superadded to it all is her dismay upon finding herself at Brack's mercy as an alternative to becoming involved in scandal, and her revolt against being coerced into physical surrender to the sleek libertine as the price of his silence.

Death offered escape from all that was ugly and loathsome; but in addition, as shown by the manner of her death, the thought of suicide exercised a positive fascination as well. By dying in beauty, as she conceived it, she could vindicate her ideal and fling a final, unanswerable challenge at the world. Voluntary death, moreover, effaced the stigma of cowardice under which she had all her life smarted. Finally, the diabolical delight she experienced in anticipating how her deed would shock the survivors out of their wits, lent a positive zest to her act of self-annihilation.

Despite all these factors exerting pressure in the direction of suicide, the nervous shock we sustain from Hedda's deed is scarcely less than that of the half-fainting Brack, as instanced by his outcry: "Good God!—people don't do such things." There is always an element of the miraculous in voluntary death; it is the greater if the impulse for the deed has ripened underground. Not that she should want to kill herself is what shocks us, but that she should have the nerve, without warning, to convert impulse into action. The real crux of the matter is that until she has actually fired the fatal shot, we do not, in our hearts, believe her capable of committing such a deed. We have seen too much of her cowardice to reckon seriously with the idea that she should find the courage to put an end to her pitiful existence.

Yet, upon reflection, we can understand her singular act of courage as much as we can understand the rest of her actions. Her suicide finds analogies in her previous conduct. On two occasions we saw the bored and cynical expression of her eyes yield suddenly to a flaming animation

that betokened an absolute concentration of her whole personality upon a single act of willing. In both cases that innervation, transforming her, was short-lived and spent itself in vain, but it betrayed for the moment the mettle of the heroine, albeit the quixotic heroine. In conceiving the impulse to suicide, her self is gathered up for the third time into a single concentrated current of will, and this time her will culminates in the action willed, because for this once both the act of willing and its execution lie in her own hand.

Cold as Hedda leaves us, her self-chosen death, for all the quixotic idealism which it betrays, strikes a finer note than we were prepared for. Her nature being what it was, warped beyond hope, narrow and self-centered to the point of complete isolation, Hedda's exit is at any rate in keeping with the best that is in her. We don't regret her passing, but neither do we scoff over her corpse.—

There are many readers of "Hedda Gabler" who will feel moved to intense compassion for poor Thea and rejoice on her account in the destruction of her cruel foe. They fail to perceive the cryptic irony which lurks underneath the objective portrayal of her personality. Circumstances conspire to show Thea in an undeservedly favorable light. The mere fact that she is the unsuspecting victim of deliberate malice is calculated to stampede our sympathies in her favor and blind our judgment as to the essential commonplaceness of her nature. By contrast to Hedda's wickedness Thea's stupidity appears in the light of a positive virtue; Hedda's cowardice and hatred of motherhood cast shadows that emphasize the illusion of Thea's courage and motherliness. Could we observe Thea in her normal surroundings, we should readily perceive that she has little but her appealing looks to trade on. Objectively regarded, Thea's impulsive decision to desert her husband and stepchildren, to

compromise herself in such a way as to throw herself upon the mercy of Lövborg's sense of chivalry, is, at best, an ambiguous demonstration of unselfish devotion. Her avowal, "I have done nothing but what I *had* to do," is subject to more than one interpretation. Her past life will not bear close examination. She had not gone blindfolded into her marriage, five years ago. For a considerable time previous she had been the governess of the Sheriff's children, she knew the responsibilities she was undertaking. Yet her single mention of the children is such as to give the impression that with all her ostensible motherliness, she feels no particle of attachment for the orphans whom she has been supposedly mothering during all those years.

Fortunately for Thea, these things remain buried in deep shadow, while full light falls upon her solicitude for her comrade. It is only in the last act, in contemplating the domestic idyl exposed to our view, that we become—almost insensibly—aware of a redistribution of lights and shadows. This same Thea, whose languishing eyes and mute, appealing glances had "inspired" Lövborg, has already found a new comrade to console her for the loss of her former one. "Ah, if I could only inspire your husband in the same way!" she whispers to Hedda. As we watch Thea Elvsted and Jörgen Tesman bending close together over their joint task, the feeling grows on us that Tesman is on the point of filling the gap left in Thea's emotional life by Lövborg's death. The ease with which Thea, in her ravenous hunger for affection, assimilates so common a product as Tesman when the flavor of Lövborg's rare spirit is still fresh on her palate, points to a lack of discrimination suggestive of a crude, voracious appetite.

As to the only other woman character who crosses Hedda's path in the Drama, there can scarcely be any serious differ-

ence of opinion. Aunt Julie, the old maiden lady, is introduced as an element of the family *milieu* in which Hedda finds herself condemned to move as a result of her marriage. She has the typical virtues and the typical shortcomings of a person of her class and her station in life. Her very genuine kindness knows no other form to take than that of overflowing sentimentality. Her strong family sense is reinforced by that rather smug brand of piety, familiarly met with among the lowly and humble, which attributes to a special solicitude of Providence the triumph of the Tesmans over the Lövborgs who would block the path of their material advancement. Without sharing her homely philosophy, we respect her for acting according to her best lights, but all in all she does not engage our sympathies to any vital extent.—

The three men who figure in our play are characterized among other things by three distinct functional relationships in which they stand to Hedda,—Tesman being the material provider, Brack the entertainer and Lövborg the hero. Of the three, Lövborg is the most sketchily treated. Eilert Lövborg's obvious kinship with Ulrik Brendel has often been remarked upon. Like the erratic gentleman-tramp of "Rosmersholm" Lövborg has that strong personal vanity which loves the flashy phrase and the theatrical gesture. The disdainful way in which he speaks of his recent, widely discussed publication as not worth the bother of Tesman's reading, is a choice bit of posing. His claim that he deliberately put nothing into the book but what everybody would agree to, in order to pave the way for his personal message, is only his exaggerated way of saying that he has already outgrown the viewpoint he held when he wrote it. The question as to the genuineness of his genius I regard as idle. We shall never know whether he was one of those rare orig-

inal minds who fructify the thought of a whole age, or simply one of those flashing meteors that arrest attention because of the brilliancy of their fireworks. Neither his lack of self-control nor his ability to be inspired by the empty-headed Thea decides the case one way or another. It is one of life's ironies that Nature can avail herself of the most brainless woman, provided she can muster the rapt gaze of the intelligent listener, to draw out the finest manifestations of masculine genius. Even as to the subject of the manuscript that perished—the future of the human race—the indications may be read either way. We know how Ibsen's thought converged upon the future; we know with what prophet's ardor he read the signs of the times as heralding the dawn of a new era about to revolutionize our present categories of thinking; and we know also how skeptical he was as to any attempt to define the vital forces of the future in all but the vaguest outline.[8]

Judge Brack recalls to mind another of the characters of "Rosmersholm," in one important particular. Like Rector Kroll he has a special talent for doing stealthy detective work, but in place of the Rector's brusqueness he has the suave polish of the perfect gentleman. From the outset Brack's eyebrows are cocked in apprehension because of Lövborg's reappearance upon the scene; and when his keen scent warns him that there is danger of Lövborg's breaking into the exclusive triangle and encroaching upon his private preserves, he moves swiftly and smoothly to effect his rival's ruin. So smooth are his operations, in fact, that were it not for the report which he gives Hedda as to the wind-up of his party, showing as it does how keenly he was on the alert as to every move of his rival's, Brack could scarcely be suspected of having contributed by deliberate intrigue to

[8] Cf. Ibsen's speech quoted on page 213.

Lövborg's downfall. However, with Brack's sinister intentions established beyond doubt, it is evident that chance simply accelerated the result which he would have striven with all the means at his command to attain sooner or later. Chance played into his hands, when Lövborg's acceptance of Hedda's challenge caused him to accept the invitation to Brack's stag party; it did so a second time when Lövborg lost his precious manuscript. Under the guise of acting the cordial host Brack had merely to see to Lövborg's getting thoroughly drunk; that accomplished, he could bank with confidence on the persuasions and the example of Lövborg's fellow-revellers doing the rest to make him conclude the orgy at the apartments of Mademoiselle Diana. As his subsequent remarks on the impossibility of Lövborg's being admitted henceforth to a single respectable house clearly show, Brack could congratulate himself on having eliminated, in irreproachable, gentlemanly fashion, a most dangerous rival.

Even at the last, in the act of clinching his victory and establishing the triangle on a solid basis, Brack maintains the suavity of the perfect gentleman. Anxious as he is to find out by what means Lövborg got possession of the pistol, he displays a remarkable combination of delicacy and shrewdness in preventing Hedda, who has already betrayed herself sufficiently by her manner, from avowing the truth in so many words. His very solicitude for shielding her reputation is the most effective means of impressing upon her the gravity of her predicament. His knowledge of Hedda's secret puts her spotless name at his mercy; but while leaving no ambiguity as to the fact that he has her in his power, he keeps up an appearance of chivalry, by pointing out to her that even if he should not keep silence as to the ownership of the pistol she could clear herself by pretending that it had been stolen. In presenting this theoreti-

cal alternative he counts, for its rejection, upon Hedda's realizing the fact that even this subterfuge would not spare her the humiliation of seeing her name linked, in the public press, with that of the red-haired singer. The more subtle consideration, that Hedda would abhor even a technical charge of theft as a further defilement of Lövborg's memory, presupposes an intuitive projection into Hedda's manner of thinking, which we can scarcely credit him with possessing.

The portrait of Brack is executed with a vividness that makes it one of the unforgettable pieces in Ibsen's gallery of characters. An even more distinctive position, however, is reserved for Tesman. In Tesman Ibsen has handled a thoroughly commonplace character with a degree of finesse which he rarely, if ever, equaled. I know of no single situation that illustrates Ibsen's peculiar genius more strikingly than Tesman's relation to Lövborg. An uncanny penetration into the secret springs of conduct combines here with an objectivity of rendering calculated to conceal rather than reveal the author's esoteric knowledge of Tesman's character. To my knowledge, the equivocal nature of Tesman's complete line of conduct, after his finding of the manuscript, has failed to arouse the suspicions of a single critic. In the nature of things, Tesman's brainless scholarship and his ludicrous naïveté have drawn the caustic sarcasm of all commentators; but many—and not the meanest of them—have stressed his large-hearted kindness and simple honesty as endowing him with some genuine human value in contrast to Hedda's corrosive perversity. The findings of our analysis will be seen to differ sharply from those commonly accepted.

Tesman is keenly aware of the fact that he is intellectually Lövborg's inferior. When Brack advances the theory that his appointment to the professorship may be made contin-

gent upon the outcome of a competition with Lövborg, he is thoroughly alarmed. Indignant gesticulation at the very idea is his first reaction to the news. For Lövborg to challenge his right to the position would be showing the most incredible lack of consideration toward him, a married man, who had run deeply into debt on the strength of mere prospects. On finding himself alone with Hedda he betrays his discouragement. "It was adventurous to go and marry and set up house upon mere expectations," he tells her. Eager as he is to snatch the merest straw of comfort, he finds balm in the reassuring words of Aunt Julie. And when the tension finally breaks, when Lövborg tells him in language which does not disguise his contempt, that he has no intentions of standing in the way of Tesman's appointment, Tesman is so little master of his feelings that he draws Brack's and Hedda's ironical comment.

However, even a fool like Tesman cannot be insensitive to the humiliation which a victory of Lövborg's in the open forum would entail for him. It is natural that his consciousness of being the weaker should make him secretly hope for some eventuality to arise to thwart his rival's success.

His stocks rise in consequence of the developments at Brack's party.

For one thing, he finds consolation in the reflection that if Lövborg outdistances him in brilliancy of intellect, he more than neutralizes this deficiency by the shining example he sets Lövborg in the matter of decent behavior. The satisfaction he experiences in contrasting his own socially accredited virtue with Lövborg's lack of self-control is so great that he can weep crocodile tears of regret over Lövborg's incorrigible weakness. More than that, he feels his own moral superiority so securely established that he can

afford even to confess to a stirring of jealousy, as he listened to his rival's brilliant essay.

Of even greater psychological importance is the fact of his find. From the outset his feelings with regard to the precious manuscript in his possession are quite complicated. At the root of his act of concealing it is the instinctive, unavowed wish to deprive his rival of the material evidence of his superiority. However, Tesman's conscience will not permit that wish to come to the surface of his consciousness. He obscures it instantly with superficial motives which serve to explain his action on high moral grounds. In the state Lövborg was in, he persuades himself, he didn't dare return it to him at once. For Eilert's sake, in order to spare him a keen humiliation, he concealed his find from his companions, and he enjoins Hedda not to tell a soul about it.

Time is gained, at any rate, by procrastination; and generous motives easily suggest themselves to Tesman for justifying further delay. He wants to give "Eilert, poor fellow, time to have his sleep out," before he surrenders the book. All this time, as his words to Hedda betray, his mind is dwelling upon the fact that there is no second copy of the manuscript in existence.

The day passes, and evening arrives without Tesman having divulged his secret. In the afternoon he had looked in at Lövborg's rooms but failed to find him. Perhaps he counted on his being out, as might well be the case, considering his presumptive state of mind on discovery of his loss. Certainly the fact that Tesman departed without leaving a note is an item of the gravest significance. Then he met Thea rushing about distractedly, but he clung to his secret. From Thea he gathered that Lövborg had called at the house that morning and talked incoherently about having torn the manuscript to pieces. Thea's own ignorance

made it sufficiently plain that Hedda had followed to the letter his injunction to keep silence. When he nevertheless asks Hedda, "But of course you told him that we had it?" he is certain, in advance, of a negative answer.

"You ought to have told him," he tells Hedda. "Fancy, if, in desperation he should go and do himself some injury!" His reply is strictly in accord with the demands of his conscience. Yet the apparent concern of his phrasing only disguises the secret hope that such a contingency might already have occurred, and it absolves him in advance of any blame for what may have happened.

Now Tesman declares his resolve to take the manuscript to Lövborg at once. Precisely what he had in mind to do must remain mere conjecture. Perhaps he hoped that Hedda would dissuade him from acting in haste. Or there was always the possibility of Lövborg's not being at home. And again, he was possibly prepared to find Lövborg in such a state of distraction to justify his deciding that it would be dangerous to tell him of his find at once even now. Be that as it may, his conscience at any rate required some sort of gesture for its temporary pacification. All that we can be certain about is that his conscience, while permitting him to drift passively into crime, was too active to allow his forming any deliberate, consciously avowed plan to suppress Lövborg's work.

Conjecture as to what might have happened is checked by Hedda's announcement that she had burned the manuscript. The first shock is almost too much for Tesman. In mingled joy and terror he screams: "Burnt! Burnt Eilert's manuscript!" Then, as he collects himself, he formulates the significance of her act in language suggestive of Torvald Helmer: "Do you know what you have done, Hedda? It's unlawful appropriation of lost property."

Swayed by a mixture of fear of consequences and sarcastic deviltry, Hedda explains that she committed the deed for love of him, and to make sure of his dancing altogether to the tune of her pipe she gives him to understand that he is to become a father. The effect of this second revelation is marvelous. Tesman claps his hands together. He shouts. He laughs in irrepressible glee. In his excitement he even gets off an excellent pun:

> No, by-the-bye—that affair of the manuscript—of course nobody must know about that. But that you burn for me,[9] Hedda, Aunt Julie must really share my joy in that.

Our insight into Tesman's complex state of mind makes us realize what a masterly flash of intuition on Ibsen's part prompted the timing of Hedda's announcement of her pregnancy at this juncture. The news that he is to be a father releases of a sudden all of Tesman's pent-up emotions. When Hedda announced the destruction of Lövborg's work he longed to cry out with glee at the materialization of his secret wishes, but his conscience restrained him, except for his first equivocal shout; he had to persuade himself that he deplored the deed on Lövborg's account. Now it is different. The second piece of news opens the floodgates of his feelings, and in the tumult of his paternal joy the waters from the first source mingle undetected with the current that has just found its legitimate release. Now he can rejoice to his fill, and no voice of conscience dares to inhibit the spontaneity of his exultation!

Fate has been kind to Tesman. Without his having had to commit an act or utter a word that he need to ascribe to any save the most honorable and exalted motives, his

[9] An idiomatic Norwegian way of saying: "that you love me so ardently." The pun of the original has to be sacrificed in putting it into good English.

rival's work has been destroyed. And Fate has a still greater kindness in store for him. As Brack brings the news of Lövborg's suicide, there is indeed a flutter of suspense; Tesman's conscience, aroused again, gives him a few uneasy moments; but the situation is saved and Tesman's peace of mind definitely assured, when Thea produces her bundle of notes—the jottings from which Lövborg dictated his book. There is a task for Tesman! With his talent for arranging other people's work, he is the very man to restore the lost manuscript. How will his conscience dare to stir in the face of his resolve to dedicate his life to this task, to make his own researches wait upon the completion of this monument to Lövborg's memory? Could friendship be more generous, could devotion be more self-sacrificing? Considering it from whatever angle one will—the appeasement of his conscience, the establishing of his scholar's reputation, the appraisement of his character as a man,—it is certain that this piece of editing will be the keystone in the making of Tesman's career.

Rarely, if ever, has Ibsen handled a commonplace character with such a degree of subtlety. The extraordinary finesse displayed in the treatment accorded to Tesman lies precisely in the equivocal nature of every single phase of his conduct. For the reader to lump Tesman with Brack, as another cold-blooded, unscrupulous rascal, were to miss the point of our analysis. Far from being a clever villain, Tesman is every bit as honorable as the average run of commonplace people. He has a conscience as efficacious as that of the average run of people: It keeps aggressive wickedness from stalking in freedom; and for the rest it keeps the mind busy building up fictitious lines of motivation to serve as covers for the manifestation of impulses that are not recognized as respectable. Ironical side-lights fall, to be

sure on the texture of this average morality, revealing its fabric to consist so largely of fraud and make-believe as to throw its wearer almost wholly upon the mercy of fortuitous circumstance. When Fate is kind enough, however, to prevent the frail tissue from being rent by any overt act, the Tesman type of conscience obligingly relapses into its normal state of quiescence. It shows no disposition to develop into the malignant tumor, the destroyer of vital tissue, as which we behold another type of conscience in the tragedy of Master-Builder Solness.

## IX

## THE MASTER-BUILDER

His fate might have been chronicled by a medieval scribe, in simple and pious narrative, as an object lesson to all good Christians to beware of challenging the authority of the Almighty. A later age, more deeply committed to theological speculation, might have beheld in Master-Builder Solness a chosen vessel of God's wrath, singled out by divinely foreordained plan to revolt in apparently successful defiance against his Maker, so that eventually, in the suddenness of his fall, God's greater glory might become manifest. This was a theme, certainly, to fire the imagination of the brooder who dramatized the struggle of Jarl Skule against King Haakon; who pitted Julian the Apostate against the Galilean. But his speculative bent had long since been curbed; he had turned miner, sinking shafts and exploring the dark corridors of the subconscious. And if the author of "Hedda Gabler" now fashions a drama out of the theme of the Master-Builder, we are led a priori to expect a psychologist's reading of a mystic's personality.

But the first reading of the drama is apt to leave an impression that seems utterly to refute any such expectations. It seems as though Ibsen, tired of the hard light of reality, had retreated to the twilight zone of mysticism, to amuse himself with the creation of an intangible set of characters, fantastic in their behavior, sensitive to the flux of occult forces, responding to psychological laws that have no counterpart in the real world. We cross the threshold of their

sphere noiselessly, with the reverent shyness of novices. Credulously, restraining the impulse to question, we listen to Halvard Solness recounting incidents that show him to be the possessor of mysterious faculties; and as if to supply bodily proof of his assertions, Hilda Wangel breezes in on her fantastic errand. Suggestion works like a charm. By the end of the first act we have become familiar with so much of what is strange that we are prepared to accept anything, however bizarre or unreal, so long as it is of a piece with the fanciful world into which we are being initiated. With unabating curiosity we follow the action to its tragic conclusion, and at last we hold the key that unlocks the mystery: For all their ardent determination to march in freedom to a goal of their own choosing, each step in Hilda's and Solness' intertwined existences has been, as it were, an automatic move toward the fulfilment of a destiny controlled by an invisible power whose hand is revealed at the moment of the Master-Builder's fatal plunge. That, we feel, is the reckoning. He who wanted Solness to devote his life to building His churches has outwitted His rebellious servant. Through Youth, through the very agency which Solness feared as the instrument of Nemesis, He has trapped him. He has tricked him into welcoming his destroyer as an ally, come to lead his cause to victory. More than this: On the very day that Solness uttered his challenge, his own kiss had awakened into being the instrument of his destruction. So during all those ten years that witnessed Solness' phenomenal rise, what had the divine sportsman been doing but "playing out line" to him, content to know that with the barb securely lodged in his flesh his game struggle was only speeding his exhaustion! Thus incidents that in their isolation appear the work of blind chance crystallize into a flawless pattern of sin and retribution.

So much for first impressions—impressions, be it remarked, that must have lain within the scope of the author's plans. (He loved to spice his plays with "deviltries" of one kind and another!) But to stop at that would be to throw to the winds what the intense schooling in naturalistic psychology of Ibsen's earlier plays should have taught us. It is necessary to start all over again, to resist the charm of suggestion, to bring to bear upon the situation senses sharpened by skepticism, to make a determined effort—in fact—to see Halvard Solness and Hilda Wangel in a naturalistic setting.

Once the serious attempt to do this is undertaken, one conclusion may be regarded as given from the outset. The mental world of the Master-Builder himself is so abnormal that a strain of insanity in his make-up must be assumed. But as Hilda's behavior also is scarcely less strange than Solness', she too appears to be somewhat unbalanced. Then the whole dramatic situation, the progress of the action and the catastrophe, are seen to hinge upon the fact that the two characters who exclusively occupy the foreground of the stage are to some degree deranged. It further follows that a merely descriptive, two-dimensional correlation of the elements that compose their respective worlds will not be sufficient to give us an intuitive understanding of their personalities; to get at the heart of the matter it will be necessary to project a series of lines from the present into the past and follow them up until they intersect in a point that furnishes the nucleus for a departure from the normal. Particularly in the case of Hilda is this genetic comprehension of her personality a matter of absolutely vital concern, since it is her initiative that starts the action under way and her aggressive sallies that keep it moving,

in contrast to Solness' essentially passive acquiescence to her lead.

Both as the central character of our drama, and as the less difficult to understand, Solness is entitled to priority in our analytical approach.

His confessions—there are three of them—supply the elements out of which, together with his conduct, we reconstruct the development of those paranoiac symptoms that now, after twelve years of growth, are in complete control of his mind. On the eve of Hilda's coming, be it said at once, his state has been heading toward a crisis. His depression has become so acute that he seeks to ease the strain on his mind by confessing a part of its burden to Doctor Herdal, despite the fact that he suspects the family doctor to be checking up on his movements. For his suspicions, which are also directed against his wife, it is impossible to discover any tangible basis; the charges he makes, of being watched as insane, are in themselves symptomatic of his morbid condition and of the approaching collapse of his mind.

It had all begun when he was still a pious builder of modest churches. Having been reared in a God-fearing home, of simple country folk, he could think of no nobler task than the one he had chosen. In the course of time he married, and the young couple set up house in the old family home which his wife had inherited from her mother. The house looked dark and forbidding but was warm and cozy, and there was an extensive garden surrounding it. The sight of those acres of good ground, going to waste, stirred up his latent spirit of enterprise. His imagination pictured the garden parcelled out into lots and covered with attractive homes of his own design. What an opportunity for advance-

ment, both from the architect's and the business-man's point of view! But, alas, it was bound to remain a mere dream, so long as the ugly old house stood, dominating the estate; and he knew that any thought of tampering with the home to which Aline clung with every fiber of her conservative nature would strike her as nothing short of sacrilege.

But the wish once conceived, however deeply locked in his breast, would not die. And then he made a discovery that completely took away his peace of mind. Up in the garret, one day, he saw a crack in the chimney flue,—a potential source of danger, and he took no steps to have it repaired. From now on he would indulge in day-dreams, picturing the old fire-trap bursting into flame, on some snappy winter day, around noon, just as he would be driving homeward, with Aline snugly tucked away in the sleigh beside him.

And then it happened. The fire broke out, in an altogether different part of the house, to be sure, at dead of night. Aline and her nursing babes were roused and carried to safety, but the emotional shock made the mother contract a fever which proved fatal to the twins, since Aline insisted on continuing to nurse them. She herself developed an internal ailment that took away all hope of her ever again becoming a mother. What with her grief over her losses and her self-reproaches, she came out of the catastrophe a broken woman, a listless semi-invalid, going about the performance of a thousand petty duties in an obstinately mechanical way, identified more and more, as the years dragged on, with an air of provocative humility that tortured worse than outright nagging, and adding to the gloom that her presence carried with it the pin-pricks of a jealousy the more exasperating as it would not show its face in the open.

The fire had consumed Solness' domestic happiness and

cluttered the site with its wreckage, but it had also paved the way for the builder. No gesture of protest against the piecemeal partition of the estate was now to be looked for on the part of the broken wife, who acquiesced in advance to all the visitations of heaven.

But under the influence of these events Solness' mental world was undergoing a gradual transformation. He had always been a brooder, groping for links with which to connect remote phenomena. Now there crowded in upon his mind a wealth of data from which his morbid hankering could derive sustenance.

To begin with, qualms of conscience rose up in his mind. All along he had been aware of his wish as being in a manner sinful. It had even led him into an actual sin of omission, in so far as it had made him neglect elementary safeguards. This voice had been drowned out, to be sure, by the irresistible clamor of his wish, but after the fire and its dreadful consequences to the children and to Aline it could no longer be hushed. And in addition to his sin he felt an acute sense of guilt toward Aline for having wished something which, in coming about, had completely wrecked her life. As the years wore on, this sense of guilt never left him; he would even derive a certain balm when Aline nursed grievances, unfounded in fact, against him, as tending to cancel at least a fraction of his load.

Then, in the wake of his qualms of conscience, Solness must have put to himself the question:—Could there not have been a mysterious connection between his wish and the catastrophe? And remembering the intensity with which he had longed for it to happen, he pondered over this possibility until his mind came to accept it as a settled fact.

As a matter of fact, his literal piety must have turned his thoughts in this direction. For one who devoutly be-

lieved a deity to be concerned with the regulation of the individual human life it was but natural to behold in the destruction of his domestic happiness the hand of God smiting him because of his sin. But if, as may be inferred, such reflections guided Solness' broodings at the outset, he soon passed beyond them; for instead of ascribing the outcome solely to a heavenly power, he attributed it to a supernatural faculty of his own. And this step marks his first decisive deviation from the normal.

The discovery that he was endowed with powers not shared by other men, that the concentration of his will in an act of wishing sufficed to bring about material results, buoyed him up and nursed a germ of megalomania that must have been latent in his system. And now the precise nature of his extraordinary faculties moved into the focus of his broodings. He began to construct a mechanism that would bridge the gap between the sphere of his wishing and the world of material fact. Had he been a Strindberg, he might have thought of it as a "psychic fluidum," a medium for the energy of will to travel on after the analogy of light waves moving through ether; but as he was steeped in Biblical lore, he fastened upon the primitive conception of the atmosphere as filled with hosts of spirits whose mission it is to be at the beck and call of certain chosen, elect individuals; and these spirits—helpers and servants, blond and dark demons, good and bad devils—he thought of as held in leash by the dictatorship of a central demon or troll. By these conceptions he had supplied a series of links that could be used to connect up any phenomena of his choosing into a causal chain.

Now as long as Solness could simply dwell on the thought of his being master of hosts of vassal spirits, he felt lifted way above the sphere of ordinary human affairs; but such

periods of buoyancy alternated with others of gloom and depression, when the burden of his guilt threatened to stifle him. Nor was this all: His original notion of the hand of God being revealed in the fire became linked up with his newly developed demonology. What could have been God's ultimate plan, he pondered, in visiting this excruciating calamity upon the head of one of the elect, who himself could command hosts of demons?

He had plenty of leisure to revolve this question in his mind while supervising the work on the church tower at Lysanger, about two years after the fire. There, at last, he struck upon an answer that placed the responsibility for the fire squarely upon God and at the same time made due allowance for his own exalted rank in the order of beings.

It was all perfectly clear: God had taken a fancy to the work of the Master-Builder who brought so much warm and heartfelt devotion to his task. And God was jealous of his building anything other than churches. He wanted to use him exclusively for His own ends. To bring that about, to make him concentrate upon the assigned mission with absolutely single-minded devotion, He conceived the idea of severing every earthly tie of attachment that bound the Master-Builder, and He straightway reduced his happy home to a heap of black ruins.

This new version of the origin of the fire made Solness turn rebel. It outraged his sense of fairness that He whom he had been serving should have stepped roughshod over what he had treasured in private. He would not submit to being a mere tool in the Other's hands. Let Him build His own churches in the future, thought Solness. He should see that Solness, too, was a power to be reckoned with.

And he decided to deliver his challenge in due form, in the open. He burned for an opportunity to match his

strength against that of the Other, in a signal way. When the tower was complete at last, his plan was set.

Solness had always been subject to vertigo. It was impossible for him to climb a scaffold or to stand exposed at any height. But for once in his life he had now decided to do the impossible, to put his command over the legions of ministering demons to a deliberate test that would either make him or break him.

On the day set for the consecration ceremonies, Halvard Solness made his way through a festive throng to the scaffold. Holding a wreath in his hand, he began to climb up the ladders, and he continued to mount until he had reached the topmost point of the pinnacle. There he deposited the wreath, amid the cheers of the spectators, and then he turned to settle his score with his Master. It was a formal declaration of independence. From now on he would build no more churches, nothing but homes for men. Then he looked at the crowd below, and in the group of schoolgirls, all dressed in white, he could see one who seemed to have gone mad with enthusiasm, to judge by the frantic way she waved her flag and screamed at the top of her voice. For a moment it confused him. He came within an inch of being overcome with a fatal dizziness, but he caught himself just in time, and his nerves held out as he descended the scaffold. It was a wonderful day for him. He had never breathed so freely; never had he tingled with such a sense of his own power.

The next day he returned home, and now a period of brisk activity set in for the Master-Builder. His creative impulse quickened by the proud consciousness of having performed the impossible, he brought to his self-chosen task a vigor and an elasticity of spirit that told alike in his architectural designs and in the commercial management of his

undertakings. For a period of years the craving to express himself in his art and the struggle to make his way to the top absorbed his energies to such an extent that only a negligible surplus was available for indulging his morbid love of brooding. Even the sight of his blighted home, far from acting as a check on his vigor, supplied a constant stimulus to his efforts:—It was, in fact, the main source of his artistic inspiration. Nothing but the deep yearning for a home of his own can account for the extravagant emotional fervor that he put into the making of his blueprints, as though by the magic power of his wish Happiness could be charmed into making her abode in the houses of his designing. Always there hovered before his mind a vision of "cozy, comfortable, bright homes, where father and mother and the whole troop of children can live in safety and gladness, feeling what a happy thing it is to be alive in the world—and most of all to belong to each other—in great things and in small."

Those were years of comparative happiness for Solness, and even the undertones of a strange timbre that would rise now and then above the steady hum of his activity were not without a certain tonic quality. One strain of these undertones would develop the theme of a heroic, self-chosen martyrdom:—In order to build happy homes for others, he had, by a deliberate act of choice, sacrificed his personal happiness.[1] Another strain would reiterate an even more seductive chord:—Had not that day at Lysanger proved his power to achieve the impossible? Should he then not suc-

[1] Solness, to Hilda, in Act III: "Yes, for now I see it. Men have no use for these homes of theirs—to be happy in. And I should not have had any use for such a home, if I had had one. (With a quiet, bitter laugh.) See, that is the upshot of the whole affair, however far I look. Nothing really built; *nor anything sacrificed for the chance of building. Nothing, nothing! the whole is nothing!*" The italics are mine.

ceed eventually, by the unrelaxed pressure of his will, to rebuild his own domestic fireside? Did not the very fact of this being, according to human reckoning, utterly impossible, make it the more fascinating a goal for a man of his caliber?

However when Solness finally found himself arrived at the top, the situation entered into a new phase. When the struggle for mastery was terminated by his being left in undisputed possession of the field, when the last of his one-time competitors had sought refuge in the ranks of his employees, his energy was no longer bound by concentration upon a definite purpose. Now the erstwhile faintly audible undertones of his musings found free access to his ear, and inch by inch, as he gave rein to his fancy, the buoyancy that had sustained him vanished, and in its stead a darkening cloud of depression settled on his mind.

The glaring logical contradictions in his scheme of reading his fate had never exercised a check on his broodings. His successive interpretations of the meaning of the fire—mutually exclusive as they would appear to the normal mind—found room to coexist in his mind without clashing. The humble sinner, the courageous rebel, the voluntary martyr—each different aspect of his selfhood retained for him its validity without discrediting the others. But a contradiction of quite another sort now stared him in the face and clamored for a solution.

How could he reconcile the outstanding success that had accompanied his enterprises with that utter feeling of desolation that had crept over him more and more and would not be shaken off? He pondered about it, until his very success began to strike him as uncanny. In good pagan fashion, after the manner of the ancients, he began to suspect his luck of being a trap,—a sort of infernal time-

mechanism, set by Him whose wrath he had incurred, to accomplish his ultimate ruin.

The conviction that God had something in reserve, grew apace. And then, one day, as he caught the look of determination in Ragnar Brovik's eye, he knew. Some day Ragnar would step over him, as he had stepped over his father. Like a faint, far-off echo, there rang in his ears the phrase of "Nemesis, through Youth."

On superficial view, Solness' fear of retribution through the agency of Youth appears to be motivated by his guilty conscience toward the Broviks. I think that this hardly goes to the root of the matter. The phrase, as he utters it time and again, bears altogether the character of a pathological obsession, a deep-seated phobia. To trace its origin, we must recall Solness' memorable experience at Lysanger. Just after he had delivered his challenge, we remember, he almost lost his head in consequence of the screaming and flag-waving of one little, white-clad devil below. During that second, when his life hung in the balance, there must have impinged upon him, with the force of a traumatic shock, the thought that this was God's answer to his challenge—a threat of future Nemesis through Youth. The next moment it must have been blotted from his mind, swallowed up in the din of joyous emotions over the success of his fantastically audacious venture. It was forgotten; but it had left an undetected lesion which, one day, reinforced his fear of Ragnar, so that it became a dread obsession which he was powerless to combat.

From now on his thoughts were bent upon staving off that day of reckoning which, he felt, was bound to come sooner or later. To that end Ragnar had to be kept down as long as possible, by fair means or foul. And in this the servants

and helpers from the spirit world again came to his succor—so he fancied—by bringing him an ally in the person of Kaia. As he saw the hysterical girl lose interest in her lover and become slavishly subservient to his own wishes, he discarded his originally entertained natural explanation of her coming. But even this renewed proof of his mystical powers could now give him little comfort. It was but another instance of that treacherous luck of which he had learned to be wary. Moreover, the strain of having to pretend, day in day out, to feelings that he did not own was too exhausting to be borne forever,—quite apart from the fact that he felt his burden of guilt accumulating day by day, in the pursuance of his cowardly intrigue.

In a final, half-hearted attempt to combat the depression that had settled on his mind, the Master-Builder set about building himself a new house, hoping against hope that by this means the miracle might still be achieved; that a home in the sense he longed for might yet be his. The lapse of years had made no change in the home ideal as he conceived it. The new house included three nurseries, completely fitted out and ready for use at a moment's notice,—just as did the house in which he was now living. In the faint hope of winning his wife back to an interest in life, as also in the discharge of a small portion of his guilt toward her, Solness had designed the interior decorations and furnishings with a view to their reminding Aline in every detail of the home in which they had been happy twelve years ago. But the new structure included one feature which it is difficult to account for: The house was flanked by a high tower.

Why this bizarre architectural feature on a dwelling house? Had Solness erected a tower on his house during the early years of his struggle, its meaning would have been

unmistakable. It would have been felt as the perpetuation of his act of challenge in the form of a concrete symbol. Now it is very probable that he nursed this ambition in the days of his ascendency. But is it conceivable that, obsessed by the dread of Nemesis, he should have ventured now upon such a gesture of provocation?

Symbols may carry a multiplicity of meanings. It seems far more plausible that the building of that tower should have been felt by Solness as, in some way or other, the performance of a magical rite designed to counteract the force of his vow that he would build no more churches. Perhaps the offended Deity would be placated by this visible act of atonement and not insist on a formal recantation? Or perhaps he calculated, with a paranoiac's cunning, that the Deity might be duped into taking as a gesture of submission what had actually been planned as a symbol of defiance? Whatever his exact process of reasoning may have been, the tower must have been built with a view to propitiating the powers that pursued him.

We have retraced Solness' career up to the moment of Hilda Wangel's arrival. The action of our drama is concerned with the effect of Hilda's presence upon him. Dazed at first by allegations that strike him as preposterous, he quickly succumbs to Hilda's irresistible charm. Her coming supplies him with fresh proof of his mystical powers, and he gladly welcomes her—the beaming impersonation of Youth—as an ally in his fight against the Youth he dreads. Before the radiance of her presence the black cloud of his depression is dissipated; he feels himself buoyed up to emotional heights such as he had never expected to reach again. Within twenty-four hours Hilda's domination of him is so complete that even his obsession cannot hold out in the face of her impetuous will: With his own hand he signs the docu-

ment that releases Ragnar. And when Hilda finally demands of him the repetition of "the impossible," his exaltation reaches such a pass that he undertakes it without flinching. And he reaches the top; but there his mind snaps under the strain. He plunges to his death.

The dramatic interest is centered upon the character of Master-Builder Solness. The enigma of the Drama, however, is not Solness, but Hilda. Solness' confessions are relatively easy to follow. If reconstructing the development of his paranoia is something of a problem, his character at the end of this development is clearly exposed to our view. With Hilda it is quite different. Instead of opening her heart and following another's lead, she acts and leaves it to us to guess, if we can, the secret of her initiative.

When Hilda blows in on the Master-Builder, with a spontaneity that quashes doubt, with an air of assurance that conquers by storm, our minds have just been so heavily charged with an account of phenomena that transcend the plane of familiar experience, that we are prepared to accept anything with a minimum of wonder. Bit by bit, as Hilda tells the story of her intimacy with Solness, ten years previous, the sheer magnetism of her manner forces the Master-Builder to a half-reluctant, half-eager admission of incidents which he absolutely fails to remember; and, like Solness, we are so completely drawn under her spell that, far from questioning the truth of her story, we accept her coming to claim her kingdom, now that the ten years are up, as perfectly natural.

But when the curiosity of passive acceptance has given way to critical inquiry, when we have learned to disentangle the strands of fact from those of morbid fancy in Solness' make-up, when we have become skeptical of his being one

of the "elect," in possession of mystical faculties,—then Hilda's claims and her behavior must also be passed in review. Then the questions that arise and the implications they carry are startling.

We begin to question seriously whether her story had any basis in fact at all. For Solness, cajole and wheedle his memory as he will, is totally unable to remember the meeting, the kisses or the promises, despite the fact that he clearly recalls the details of his memorable ascent to the tower. The conclusion of the second act shows that even on the day following Hilda's arrival none of the facts alleged have come back to his mind. It seems hardly possible that Solness could have forgotten this incident so completely, unless a case of pathological amnesia be assumed; but nothing to motivate such a lapse of memory is discoverable. On the other hand, if nothing such as Hilda describes ever happened, then she must have dreamed the whole story.

For, of course, her belief in her story is not open to question. But how could she have come to believe it? Obviously, it must have taken shape originally as a wish:—to be kissed by the Master-Builder, to be thought of by him as his princess, and to be promised a kingdom. And she must have dwelt on this wish with such fervid intensity as finally to hypnotize herself into accepting it as a fact of her experience. The ability to intermingle fact with fancy to this extent, however, is characteristic only of small children and of adults who have never outgrown the mental habits of childhood; hence our supposition can stand as plausible only if other features of Hilda's conduct yield traces of an abnormal infantilism. And that is indeed the case.

That Hilda still resembles a child in many respects will not be questioned. Every nook and cranny of her mind, for instance, is filled with fairy tales. The exploits of trolls and

princes are still so real to her that analogies to their fantastic world crop up at every turn of her experience. She dreams of a castle in Spain. Her hero must be something of a troll. She recommends tying a knot in a handkerchief as an aid to memory. When on the morning after her coming she speaks of her bedroom as "all the empty nurseries I slept in," it is associations from stories like that of Snow-White that dictate the choice of her phrasing. It is largely thanks to this buoyant, childlike freshness of her imagination that she appears so winsome; and to suspect her mental balance on that score alone would seem nothing short of grotesque.

But can her nonchalant way of breezing in pass unchallenged, on the blanket certificate of childlike buoyancy? Even supposing that Solness did kiss the girl of thirteen and promise that he would return in ten years' time, and abduct her like a troll and buy her a castle in Spain—is it conceivable that any normal girl of twenty-three, however imaginative, would pursue him into his home, when the time was up, and demand her kingdom? To do so even in jest would have required a degree of courage; but Hilda's manner, for all the playful and coquettish banter which she uses to captivate Solness, shows that she is in dead earnest. Whatever view of the case we lean to, Hilda's coming must remain a mystery until we have fathomed the experience that caused the adolescent girl's imagination to focus upon the Master-Builder.

In her efforts to jog his memory as to the incidents of that day at Lysanger, Hilda gives us the external facts of that experience, without herself understanding their significance either then or now. We must interpret them for her.

She watched the completion of a tower that impressed her childish fancy as the highest thing human hands could build.

She saw the Master-Builder in person mount to its pinnacle and fasten the wreath to the weather-vane. With breathless intensity her eyes had followed his climb. As he mounted higher and higher, one wave of vertigo after another set her body in ever more intense vibration; thrills of weakness, an inextricable blending of pleasure and pain leapt up and down her spine; until at the climax of his ascent her emotions culminated in an orgasm that set free all her motor energies, making her shout and gesticulate like one possessed.

This happened when Hilda, a high-strung, excitable youngster, was passing through the critical period of adolescence. Sex had not yet come to a conscious awakening within her, but its urge had begun to make itself felt dimly by strange body sensations and thrills that convey a shock and yet carry an undertone of pleasure arousing a vague wish for their repetition. These stirrings of sex, as is well known, frequently take the form of dreams of falling; and while most people speak of them as conveying only sensations of terror, others are so distinctly aware of the peculiar element of pleasure blended with the shock, as to welcome such dreams and even to cultivate them. Now during the whole period of adolescence there is ever present the danger of the pleasure coupled with sensations of sexual origin becoming so closely bound up in the conscious mind with irrelevant processes, as to divert the whole development of sex life from its normal course.

That is what happened to Hilda. It turned out to be a matter of fatal significance that the first complete voluptuous orgasm she experienced should have been essentially "autoerotic," being induced by those sensations of vertigo that had already afforded thrills of a fainter sort to her dream life. From now on she consciously sought a repetition of those thrills in her dreams; and in the measure of

their intensity falling short of that orgasm, it became established in her memory as the qualitative and quantitative ideal of voluptuous pleasure. Compared to the rest of her experience, it was "the impossible" come true once—the impossible which she longed to experience a second time with the tense ardor of demanding youth.

The incident that thrilled the girl of thirteen has remained the emotional peak of her life at twenty-three. After ten years it still figures as the unchallenged climax which no subsequent experience of hers has been able to dislodge from its position of exclusive preëminence.[2]

That the builder who had designed this tower, who by mounting it was responsible for that unique experience of her adolescence, became the girl's hero; that her imagination endowed him with a skill and boldness which no other mortal could reach up to, follows almost as a corollary. But that he continued to hold his privileged position in the mind of the grown woman shows that her emotional life had become definitely set as a result of her experience; that her development in one of its fundamental phases had come to a dead stop.

She has grown into a handsome woman, a dangerous charmer, who knows her power and delights in its exercise. She knows perfectly well in a rational way that there are towers in the world compared to which her church steeple in Lysanger is a pygmy; that the thrilling exploits of folklore have no counterpart in the real world; and that king-

[2] *Cf.* Act II. *Solness.* It is hopeless, Hilda. The luck is bound to turn. A little sooner or a little later. Retribution is inexorable. *Hilda.* (In distress, putting her hands over her ears.) Don't talk like that! Do you want to kill me? To take from me what is more than my life? *Solness.* And what is that? *Hilda.* The longing to see you great. To see you, with a wreath in your hand, high, high up upon a church-tower.

doms are not to be had for the asking. But her will keeps all this knowledge at arm's length from the exclusive inner world of her own making.

In her decision, therefore, when the ten years are up, to confront her ideal hero with his flesh and blood original, Hilda invites a crisis that imperils the whole airy fabric of her day-dreams; for had Solness turned out to be a master-builder like any other, her spirited sally would have ended in a humiliating rout. But Hilda could scarcely have been aware that there was anything to risk. The confidence with which she goes about her fantastic errand shows how deeply she is committed to her inner world. And it is this naïve confidence, tolerating not a tremor of doubt, that batters down the gates of Solness' defenses and makes him surrender unconditionally to her lead.

But what, in the last resort, did Hilda want of Solness? She has come to claim her promised kingdom, she reaffirms time and again, in answer to his puzzled questions, leaving it to him to guess what she meant by that cryptic phrase. It was not to be a mere visit, either; she had come to stay. Before she has been in the room many minutes, she intimates that the days of Kaia's usefulness are numbered; yet Solness' suggestion that she step into the bookkeeper's place meets with a disdainful rebuff. "There must surely be plenty of other things to be done here," she says. At the end of Act I, when Solness, completely bewitched by her charm, confesses, "You are the very being I have needed most," her face lights up, as she replies: "Then I *have* my kingdom! Almost—I was going to say." But the next morning, Solness' renewed expression of his gratitude—"Oh, Hilda, I can't tell you what a good thing it is for me that you have come! For now at last I have some one to un-

burden myself to"—draws her reply, in a tone betraying her disappointment: "Was that all you meant when you said you needed me?"

Hilda is not content to be a repository for his confessions. Her ambitions fly higher. Her kingdom must be something more thrilling. But neither can she be set on making him her lover, in the usual sense, if her sex life has been arrested, as we supposed, at an autoerotic stage.

She has come to claim her place as his princess—that, in essence, is the kingdom she has set out to gain. As he has been her hero, so she wants to feel herself now as his heroine. As he has dominated her thoughts since that day at Lysanger, so she wants to dominate his thoughts now and have him reflect light of her light and kindle fire from her fire. Her presence shall be to him an inspiration for accomplishing something that by his own unaided strength he could not have undertaken. With her by his side, he must shrink from nothing and confess to no short-comings. He must prove himself the hero without a flaw; the hero, henceforth, of her making—not for his sake, but for hers, so that she may feel the intoxicating thrill of her power. To borrow her own figure, Solness is to build castles with high, projecting balconies, where she can stand and look down on the others—on those who build churches and those who build homes for mother and father and the children, and where she will receive her Master-Builder with the condescension becoming to a princess.

Thus, at bottom, Hilda's hero-worship is incense burned on the altar where she herself is enthroned as the reigning divinity. It is rooted in the passionate adoration of self, known as "narcism" in the psychologist's parlance. Her attitude toward her ideal hero is essentially possessive, like that of Hedda Gabler to Eilert Lövborg. She makes the

degree of her power to inspire him the index of her own quality. She is interested in him not as an independent personality, but only as a function of her own life. She demands that he live up to her ideal concept; and if he snap under the strain, she will, at most, feel a pang—not of sympathy, but of regret for having suffered a loss.

What Solness wanted of Hilda was sympathetic understanding. But that was the one thing she was utterly unable to give him. She drew him out and pretended and even fancied to understand him; but without taking any pains to project herself into his point of view she seized only upon those items of his confessions which could serve as levers for the furtherance of her plans. Thus when he asks, whether she does not also believe that there exist special, chosen people endowed with the faculty of desiring a thing so persistently and so inexorably that at last it has to happen, she counters his query by replying: "If that is so, we shall see, one of these days, whether *I* am one of the chosen." It was not only the well-nigh impassable gulf between age and youth which made it impossible for her to understand him; not only the fact that to his every catchword her own experience responded with trains of associations:—She lacked the patience even to attempt it! How different it was in her heart to heart talk with Aline! When Aline confided to her the tragic loss of her nine dolls, Hilda's sympathetic response was vivid and instantaneous; there she felt the contact of a type of experience kindred to her own, there was the common bond of infantile psychology. And for a moment it was so strong that she could contemplate abandoning her plans, turning her back on Solness and leaving him to his fate.

Hilda's first opportunity to put her power over Solness to the test arises in connection with Ragnar's drawings.

Solness' brusque refusal of Ragnar's request for a note of recommendation offended her,—not because of any stirring of sympathy for Ragnar, but simply because it did not conform to what she expected of her hero. It seemed small, to refuse a suppliant such a trifle; he might even have lied a bit, she says, to give the poor fellow some encouragement. It was all right for *her* to tell Solness that no one except himself should have the right to build, but for him to stand on the letter of his rights seemed to her anything but kingly. In spite of Solness' visible uneasiness in Ragnar's presence and the pleading tone in which he finally couched his refusal, it had never occurred to Hilda that his action could have been dictated by fear. But the moment the unbelievable is thrust upon her mind as a fact, by his own admission, she becomes stiff and unyielding in her demand that he sign Ragnar's release right then and there. Sooner than she could have hoped for, chance had thrown in her way a signal opportunity for buoying up her hero beyond himself, by the fierce urge of her indomitable will. However, the exultant thrill of power which Hilda feels in scoring this victory is reinforced from another source which we cannot afford to overlook.

Our study of Hilda has revealed marked infantile traits in her reaction to experience. The wonderful, the gruesome, the fantastic, continues to elicit from her the intense emotional response of the child. Her sex life, we observed, has been arrested at the essentially autoerotic stage of the adolescent. There goes with it a narcistic glorification of self to which her hero-worship is called into contribution. Hilda exemplifies, finally, another feature of adolescence which it would be a fatal mistake to ignore.

The awakening of sex is commonly ushered in by manifestations of cruelty. The desire to inflict pain (and its

converse, to suffer the same) is conspicuously present in the transition period of neurotic individuals, but it is to be frequently observed in the normal child as well. Like the other groping impulses of adolescence, this "sadistic" impulse also runs the danger of becoming set.

Hilda's hunger for thrills is reinforced by a distinct note of cruelty. The instances of its assertion are numerous. Her eager interruption of Solness' account of the fire, with the question, "What happened? Do tell me! Was any one burnt?", shows her innervated by the wish for something gruesomely thrilling. The pleasure with which she contemplates violation at the hands of a brutal viking; the delight with which she dwells on her likeness to a bird of prey, making her ask vehemently, "Why should not *I* go a-hunting—I, as well as the rest? Carry off the prey I want—if only I can get my claws into it, and do with it as I will,"—these reveal an innate ferocity of disposition. But her instinctive cruelty finds its supreme gratification in inflicting pain upon her hero.

On close listening, we clearly detect the note of cruelty in Hilda's insistence that Solness sign Ragnar's writ of release. Solness' mental struggle, his extreme reluctance, the agony involved for him in the act, gives her consciousness of the power she is exercising its supreme zest. As he winces under the compelling force of her demand, her pleasure at the sight of his pain finds expression in words that suggest the purring of the cat while at play with the mouse. "And now we will write on the drawings," she says, as she leans over the back of his chair. "We must write very, very nicely and cordially—for this horrid Ruar—or whatever his name is."

But nothing makes the chord of cruelty vibrate so voluptuously as her anticipation of Solness' doing the impossible

a second time, under the duress of her will. As in the first test of strength, her wish to see Solness hang the wreath in person was uttered before she had any inkling of his physical inability to gratify her desire; and as in the previous case, the very sight of all his instincts stiffening in opposition to her wish, hardened her craving into an inexorable demand. To see him mount the tower unfalteringly, without a touch of dizziness, would in itself have spelt voluptuous rapture for her; but to see him do so in defiance of a deadly fear, to picture the gruesome strain under which his taut nerves would be threatening to snap at every step upward,—this promised a degree of ecstasy far in excess of that voluptuous orgasm, ten years previous, that had definitely set her development.

We are now able to appreciate Hilda's demand for the impossible as the supreme psychological climax of her existence. It is urged by the unanimous chorus of all the voices clamoring within her for the gratification of desire. The prospect of seeing the Master-Builder mount the tower draws a response from the child's thrills over exciting adventure; from the adolescent's autoerotic hunger; from her narcistically colored hero-worship; and from her sadistic lust. Every tributary stream of her being is gathered into a single channel, to form one mighty current of concentrated willing that crushes all resistance in its sweep toward its goal.

Hilda's response to the Master-Builder's plunge is an outcry of delirious exultation. For her, the thrill of the climax completely deadens the shock of the catastrophe. In contrast to Hedda, who failed, Hilda's will had sufficient strength to buoy up her hero, so that he gave her the supreme spectacle of his dying in beauty. And looking fur-

ther backward, the Master-Builder's fate appears as a new and subtle variation of the old theme of "All or Nothing."

We started out by naïvely reading the Master-Builder as a pious mystery-play. Our second, critical study reduced the action to the psychological interplay of two highly abnormal characters, without, I trust, thereby reducing its fascination. But for the student of Ibsen's personality, perceiving, as he must, the threads of personal experience and confession woven into the fabric of "The Master-Builder," the drama invites a third approach. There lies a peculiar fascination in unraveling these biographical threads and prolonging them indefinitely with the aid of fancy, until, as often as not, they end in air-castles, with—possibly—a solid foundation.

The basic situation of our drama—a young girl taking an oldish man by storm—has a striking counterpart in Ibsen's life. From recent experience he knew what havoc youth can play with an old man's heart. The last chapter alluded to the upheaval that shook Ibsen to the very core of his being, when the Viennese girl's radiant presence broke in upon his musings at Gossensass. For months he was a prey to violent agitation, before he succeeded in again bending his will to concentration upon an artistic task, and even then he sought refuge in a theme that was as remote as possible from his own intimate experience. Years had to elapse, before he could safely permit his mind to dwell once more upon those haunting memories. But then he mastered them, by making them tributary to his art.

We shall see in detail how many traits of Ibsen's own self have found their way into the character of the Master-Builder. To what extent the dialogue of the Play owes its

haunting, whimsical quality to the reproduction of actual bits of conversation with which Ibsen and his young charmer whiled away the hours, must remain a matter of conjecture. And it would be rash to attempt to state how much Hilda Wangel has in common with Emilie Bardach, beyond a superficial resemblance. The young lady herself was positive enough in making the identification. She sent Ibsen her photograph, and signed it "Princess of Orangia," much to his annoyance. In view of Ibsen's extreme shyness about exposing his private life to the public gaze, it is quite possible that he linked our Hilda Wangel with the flapper we met in "The Lady from the Sea," in the deliberate attempt to block any inquisitive guesses as to a possible life model.

As for Solness, he cannot possibly be a portrait likeness of Ibsen, if for no other reason, because he is a paranoiac. Had Ibsen, like his Master-Builder, allowed his broodings to get the upper hand, he would never have written his dramas. He might very easily, however, have become another Solness, if his dramatic imagination had not provided an outlet for the periodic discharge of the accumulated morbid matter pressing on his own mind. The need for this outlet must have increased as Ibsen advanced in years; for each of his last four plays is built around a character that is felt in the last analysis to be a projection of Ibsen's own self—real or potential. Alfred Allmers, John Gabriel Borkman and Professor Rubek have this in common with Halvard Solness.

The resemblance of Solness to Ibsen covers many points. Both had risen from small beginnings to a dominating position. Both were self-made men. Just as Ibsen had struggled to the top without the advantages of a thorough academic schooling, Solness had lacked the training that would

warrant his using the title of architect; he sticks to the old-fashioned "master-builder." Solness' early profession as a builder of churches, renounced later in favor of building homes for men, also has a certain analogy in Ibsen's career:—After his first period of creating dramas with idealistic spires, Ibsen came down to earth and henceforth devoted himself to the study of man in a modern social setting. An idea similar to Solness' conception of himself as a chosen, elect individual had played a leading part in Ibsen's early thinking; he, too, had thought of himself as endowed with a special mission; and the idea had continued to spook in his mind after the old theology—its logical support—had been abandoned. Again, we have seen Ibsen's revolt against the sickly conscience that was his heritage, his ardent—yet diffident—longing for the robust conscience of the Viking, find voice time after time in his dramas. Similarly, Hilda's taunt directed against a master-builder who dares not climb as high as he builds, sounds like the echo of reproaches that Ibsen must have leveled against himself for his own timid observance of convention in contrast to the radicalism of his views.

The challenge of his position on the part of the younger generation is a fear that gives the Master-Builder no peace. Was Ibsen himself getting uneasy at the thought that some day he would be superseded? Did he feel a menace to his supremacy in the vigorous self-assertion of a new generation of young dramatists in Germany and the Scandinavian countries? For the moment these young revolutionaries—he may have thought—were fighting under his banner; but how long would it be before their desire for independence would make them turn against their teacher and scrap him as old-fashioned? Some critics have even gone so far as to identify Ragnar with Gerhart Hauptmann and to find an

intentional parallel between the action of "The Master-Builder" and that of Hauptmann's "Lonely Lives,"—rather unconvincingly, I think. In all this mass of conjecture one fact stands out as certain: The realization that old age had come upon him must have given Ibsen a sharp pang. It had made him intuitively aware of the cleavage of generations as a well-nigh impassable barrier to mutual understanding.

Solness broods over the fact that his phenomenal luck has been unable to give him a sense of happiness. "I must tell you what this sort of luck feels like," he exclaims to Hilda. "It feels like a great raw place here on my breast." This is a cry wrung from Ibsen's own heart. To know that this feeling was not merely a passing cloud which could be banished by energetic work, but a festering sore that never closed, we should scarcely require such a specific confession as that contained in a letter three years later. "There is, of course," he writes to Jonas Collin on July 31, 1895, "a certain satisfaction in becoming so well known in these different countries. But it gives me no sense of happiness. And what is it really worth—the whole thing?—"

"What is it really worth?" In casting up accounts, the same sense of futility overpowers Ibsen as makes his Master-Builder exclaim: "Nothing really built; nor anything sacrificed for the chance of building. Nothing, nothing! The whole is nothing!"

The Master-Builder's acute sense of unhappiness is linked to the fact that he has no home in the real sense of the word. In this, again, Ibsen bares one of his own deepest yearnings. During all the twenty-seven years which he spent in Rome, in Dresden, in Munich, he had lived in temporary quarters; he had had nothing that he could call a home. In 1891—the year before he wrote "The Master-Builder"—

he finally took the long-debated step and returned to his native country. He settled down in Christiania, but the change did not bring him any feeling of being at home. Six years after, on June 3, 1897, he could write to his old friend, Georg Brandes: "Up here, by the fjords, is my native land. But—but—but! Where am I to find my homeland?" And the same plaintive note recurs the next year, in his speech at a banquet commemorating his seventieth birthday. After disabusing his audience of the idea that a "fairy-tale" career such as his must necessarily carry with it a great feeling of happiness, he continues:

> But the inward real happiness—that is not a find, not a gift. That can be acquired only at a price which is often felt as very oppressive. For this is the point: He who has won for himself a home out there in the many lands—in his innermost depths he feels altogether at home nowhere,—not even in the land of his birth.

And though he adds, "But that can perhaps still come," he knew in his heart that this was but a gracious gesture in return for the honors bestowed.

We are justified in asking whether Ibsen himself felt a burden of guilt toward his wife, for having deprived her of a home, in analogy to Solness. This would seem altogether probable, even though Fru Susanna's vigorous personality can have had little in common with the morbid and listless Aline. Ibsen may have felt frequently enough that her talent, which lay in the direction of making a home and mothering a flock of children, had been sacrificed to his career. The theories on the artist's married life developed by Lyngstrand in "The Lady from the Sea," point to Ibsen as smarting under such self-reproaches even at that time. How much more must this have been the case when Ibsen

was assailed by moods that made his life work, which had entailed the sacrifice of another's existence, seem altogether futile!

Whether Ibsen's relation to his wife has any deeper connection with the bleak marriage of Solness and Aline I do not venture to say. However, the origin of "The Master-Builder" might warrant such an inference. Ibsen himself designated as the original nucleus of his drama a short poem [3] picturing, not age pitted against youth, but a married couple seeking, in the charred ruins of their home, for a lost treasure. And though they find their treasure—so runs the thought of the concluding stanza—never will she find her faith again, nor he his happiness. If the obscure symbolism of this poem reflects a tragedy in the family life of the Ibsens, they had the dignity, at any rate, to guard their secret from a curious public.

In the minds of both Solness and Ibsen, their acute unhappiness is linked with the loss of a home; and Ibsen, like Solness, did not win recognition until he had ceased to have a home. The analogy is so close that we are tempted to search in Ibsen's life for something to correspond to the fire.

Fame came to Ibsen quite suddenly, after a long struggle, with the publication of "Brand" in 1865, a year after he had left his native land. His departure from Norway, obviously, marks his loss of home. But his journey southward, on a stipend, does not answer to the symbol of the fire. In recalling the circumstances, however, under which Ibsen turned his back on Norway, we come upon a real conflagration. The Prusso-Danish war of 1864 had the effect on Ibsen's career of a liberating calamity.

For Ibsen left Norway, after the fall of Dyppel (April

[3] Dated March 16, 1892.

18, 1864), in unspeakable indignation over what he considered Norway's base treachery against Denmark. He regarded himself in effect as exiled. And this feeling was anything but a passing flurry of rage. The year before, when the clouds of war were gathering and Norway took no steps to come to Denmark's assistance, Ibsen's wrath had burst upon his countrymen in his poem, "A Brother in Distress." (December, 1863). In flaming verse, anticipating events, it pictured the turpitude of Norway as an accomplished fact. It showed Denmark, betrayed by the "poisonous Judas-kiss" of Norway's vows of friendship, bleeding to death in a gallant but hopeless struggle against superior odds. But its eloquence reached its highest pitch in contemplating the fate awaiting those who had wantonly broken their vow. Apostrophizing his countrymen, Ibsen bids them flee across the seas, wander homeless from port to port, forget the name that has become a byword of dishonor, and hide from their very selves in shame. Henceforth the moan of every wind blowing across Norway from the Danish coast shall strike terror into the hearts of the slackers, by reiterating the reproaches of the betrayed. By this poem Ibsen had served notice on Norway what *his* decision would be, in case his country failed Denmark in the crisis. And he was consistent with a vengeance. Six years later he tersely sums up the situation in the statement: "'A Brother in Distress' found no response. So I went into exile!"[4] The circumstance that a stipend at that very time provided the means of his going to Rome does not alter the fundamental fact that Ibsen regarded all sentimental ties between himself and his native land as severed, from the moment Norway's national policy was decided upon. We have but to turn over the pages of Ibsen's letters, for a long period of years

[4] Letter to Peter Hansen, October 28, 1870.

after 1864, to see this view of the case confirmed beyond the shadow of a doubt. Each new mention of Norway—where extraneous considerations do not compel him to do violence to his natural feelings [5]—provokes him to renewed outbursts of rage and contempt.[6] When he seriously considers a return to the North, it is not Norway but the Danish Capital where he plans to settle.[7]

Thus the war fully answers to the character of the fire that robbed Ibsen and his wife of home; and it also cleared the road to success for the artist. As his letters from the time of his first Roman sojourn show, the experience of seeing Italy was Ibsen's artistic liberation. It fully awakened his latent powers; it swept aside the inhibitions that had barred his faith in himself; it gave Haakon the ascendancy over Skule.

It is almost too much to hope that the conflagration in Ibsen's life will yield further analogies to the fire that Solness wished for in secret. Incredible as it may seem, however, there are indications of Ibsen, too, having secretly wished for the calamity to occur. Such a discovery would go a long way toward explaining the extreme irritability with which Ibsen all his life reacted to developments in Norway—an irritability that fully deserves the name of a pathological complex.

It may be assumed as certain that the wish to leave Norway had troubled Ibsen for a good many years before he found the means to put it into effect. He must have felt that up North, in the provincial atmosphere of his country,

[5] As, for instance, in his letter to Björnson, Jan. 28, 1865.

[6] See the following letters: To Björnson, Sept. 16, 1864; to Magdalene Thoresen, Dec. 3, 1865; to Björnson, March 4, 1866; to John Grieg, March 22, 1866; to Magdalene Thoresen, Oct. 15, 1867; to Björnson, Dec. 28, 1867; to Michael Birkeland, Oct. 10, 1871; and many others.

[7] Letter to Georg Brandes, April 25, 1866; also a letter to Björnson, undated, of October, 1866.

his talent could never expand to its natural limits. He must have smarted under the cramping restraint of his confined sphere of action all the more cruelly, as his ambition was set upon reaching the pinnacle of human achievement. One of his earliest poems, "The Eider Duck" (1851), warrants the belief that its transparent symbolism voices Ibsen's own longing to leave the cruel North and seek a new home in the sunny South.[8] And a letter which he wrote to the Norwegian Government on March 10, 1863, reinforces his renewed request for a stipend with the statement that his economic circumstances had already forced him to take preliminary steps to the end of emigrating to Denmark the following spring.

However, the urge of immoderate ambition in his heart was coupled with an intense moral earnestness which, while it sanctioned the sacrifice of all other interests to the one cause, at the same time restricted his freedom of action. Ibsen felt that God had singled him out for a mission. Like the Old Testament prophets, he had heard the summons, calling him to be a moral leader to his people. He had been endowed with great gifts—he told himself—in order that he might rouse his countrymen from the slothful stupor of their material pursuits. It is significant that Brand, with whom he felt identified in his best moments, sacrifices his own inclination and returns from a sunnier clime to the gloom of his Northern home, in order to take up his place at the post which God assigned him.

Ibsen saw his own duty lying before him with equal clearness. It conflicted with his wishes, and the conflict grew, as each new year failed to bring him the recognition he had

[8] It must not be overlooked, however, that the poem's pointed conclusion is of a later date. In its present form the poem was first published in the collected edition of 1871.

hoped for. From year to year his indignation over Norway's ethical and artistic indifference grew hotter. The attitude of his country in the Prusso-Danish conflict was the last straw.

Now, as the crisis drew near, and Ibsen felt ever more keenly that his star pointed to Denmark rather than to Norway, nothing seems more human than that his wish to chuck his irksome responsibility to his native land should have caused him to balance alternatives in the form of a clear-cut logical dilemma. "If your countrymen break their solemn pledge to their Danish brothers"—so he may have soliloquized—"they will have made themselves an outcast among the nations of the earth. By their own act they will have proved themselves so hopelessly sunk in sloth as to be beyond saving. Then you will be absolved of any duty toward them,—then you can follow your own star wherever it may lead."

Such a thought, once formulated, was bound to take on the hue of a wish. It was countered, of course, by the desire for his country to redeem her honor; but each successive day that saw his country hold timidly aloof, was bound to give an added impetus to his wish.

At that time he resolved to stake everything upon one card. In a final appeal to the Norwegian conscience he wrote his poem, "A Brother in Distress"; we know with what result.

Now the very form of this poem lends color to the hypothesis that Ibsen's righteous wrath was crossed by a current of wishing. As remarked above, the poem anticipates events. When Norway's decision is still hanging fire, it pictures the country's disgrace as an accomplished fact, and its language attains its greatest vividness in visualizing the consequences of his deed to the cowardly slacker.

It may, of course, be explained as a purely rhetorical device, this anticipation of the facts, and I cannot prove the contrary. I must rest my case with pointing out that wishes crystallize into images and dreams of fulfilment; that the nursing of such a secret wish is altogether in keeping with the psychology of one who felt himself torn, like Ibsen, between his ambition and the weight of his mission; and finally that, once he had broken the irksome tie, the memory of the wish may well have rankled as an irritating sore which his sickly conscience would not allow to heal,—the more so as Ibsen, too, had to learn that the roots of nationality go deeper than the knife of even a ruthless surgeon can reach. If the reader should feel, despite this, that I have indulged in the building of air-castles, he will find in our drama other, untouched threads of allusion aplenty, which he can work into airy patterns of his own designing.

## LITTLE EYOLF

Professor Rubek, the central figure of Ibsen's Dramatic Epilogue, "When We Dead Awaken," is a sculptor of world-wide fame. Since the completion of his great symbolical group, "The Resurrection Day," an irrepressible sense of failure has made him confine himself to the less ambitious task of portrait sculpture. He has grown wealthy, executing the commissions of the plutocrats, but in seeming to cater to their wishes, he has secretly given rein to a satanic love of caricature—the negative complement to his idealism.

"They are no mere portrait-busts," the morbidly brooding sculptor tells his simple little wife. "There is something equivocal, something cryptic, lurking in and behind these busts—a secret something, that the people themselves cannot see. . . . I alone can see it. And it amuses me unspeakably.—On the surface I give them the 'striking likeness,' as they call it, that they all stand and gape in astonishment—but at bottom they are all respectable, pompous horse-faces, and self-opinionated donkey-muzzles, and lop-eared, low-browed dog-skulls, and fatted swine-snouts—and sometimes dull, brutal bull-fronts as well. . . . And it is these double-faced works of art that our excellent plutocrats come and order of me. And pay for in all good faith—and in good round figures too—almost their weight in gold, as the saying goes." (337-9.) [1]

[1] The page references here and in the following are based on volume XI of the Scribner Copyright Edition in thirteen volumes. New York, 1911.

"I alone can see it. And it amuses me unspeakably."—Is this merely Professor Rubek speaking, or is it Henrik Ibsen himself, withdrawing the curtain from one of the secret recesses of his soul? Did Ibsen himself indulge in the shaping of such double-faced portraits, human enough likenesses as they seemed, but revealing to his own diabolically keen scrutiny the treacherous leer or the rapacious grin or the dull vacant stare of the beasts of the wilderness, the stable and the kennel?

To summon the vast crew of human-all-too-human characters from Ibsen's modern plays as instances of such double-faced portraiture would be beside the point. Torwald Helmer, Pastor Manders, Gregers Werle, Hjalmar Ekdal, Kroll, Brack,—they all range themselves without difficulty into the motley menagerie, for the discerning reader. They do not make good Ibsen-Rubek's boast: "I alone see it." No, if this boast is to be taken as a personal confession, it must mark Ibsen's glee over the fact that the master of satire has actually succeeded in deceiving the public as to his intentions. It must mean that he exults because he succeeded by the very subtlety of his art in leading the reader into a trap; that he gloats over the finesse with which he has contrived to conceal his own deepest secret reading of the characters of his creation.

I have in mind two genuine cases of such double-faced portraiture. The first, already discussed in these pages, is Jörgen Tesman, Hedda's self-sacrificing husband. The second case concerns Ibsen's drama "Little Eyolf" and its central character, Alfred Allmers. No other play of Ibsen's has been so grossly misinterpreted, even by discerning critics. They have walked into a cunningly contrived trap, to Ibsen's grim amusement.

The prevailing view in regard to "Little Eyolf" is summarized by Roman Woerner in the following paragraph:

Die Kritik konnte feststellen, Klein Eyolf zeige den Dichter in eine religiöse Ergriffenheit emporgehoben, die ohne Einschränkung bejaht, all Übel der menschlichen Schwäche beimisst und auf die Überwindbarkeit dieser Schwäche hinweist. Das Drama ende nicht, wie die meisten andern, mit einem Fragezeichen, nicht mit einem tragischen Schluss oder einer Disharmonie, sondern mit einem versöhnenden Akkord aus höheren Sphären, in dem sich alle irdischen Missklänge zu voller und endgültiger Harmonie auflösen.[2]

Apart from minor reservations, Woerner shares this point of view. To be sure, he views the questionable hero, Alfred Allmers, with a critical eye. His keen scrutiny reveals some disconcerting points of similarity between Allmers and the notorious Hjalmar Ekdal of the "Wild Duck."

"Dem allem ungeachtet," he concludes, "ist es doch offenba des Dichters Absicht, uns eine echte, nicht bloss scheinbare, nicht auf Selbsttäuschung beruhende grosse Wandlung in Allmers zu veranschaulichen. Eine Wandlung von geistigem Egoismus zu selbstloser Hingabe." [3]

He feels uneasy, it is true, in attempting to square Ibsen's presumable intention with the actual result.

Die Abhängigkeit (Allmers') von ihrer (Rita's) Führung, die Unselbständigkeit, drückt ihn doch wieder ein wenig herab, und gibt uns bis zuletzt ein sehr gemischtes Wohlgefallen an dem dünnbärtigen, dünnhaarigen Manne mit dem ernsten nachdenklichen Gesicht und den sanften Augen.[4]

[2] Henrik Ibsen, II, 288. Beck; München; 1912.
[3] *Ibid.*, 289.
[4] *Ibid.*, 301.

Nevertheless, Ibsen's manner of treating Allmers' foibles reminds him of a parent's fond indulgence toward a favorite child.

> Allmers, geboren aus des Dichters damals so starker "Sehnsucht nach dem Tode," wurde notwendig einer, der nie leben lernt und die Erde lieben und das Lachen dazu. Und wir dürfen vermuten, dass der Vater ein Wohlgefallen empfunden an seinem Sohne. Denn mit fühlbarer Milde und Liebe betrachtet er Schwächen, die er sonst streng beurteilt. Ja, er gibt mit bewegtem Gemüte seine Genehmigung zum lebensfeindlichen Kompromiss, zu einem "Selbstmordleben" für andre,—er wird zum "Prediger des langsamen Todes." [5]

Since Woerner, in the passages quoted, has expressed not merely his own but the prevailing critical opinion, his statement of the case may suffice. As we see, it is built on the assumption that Ibsen's intention obviously was to convey a serious message through the personality of Alfred Allmers; and it implies the admission that, judged by the poet's intentions, the character portrait of Allmers is a partial failure. Now it is clear that we must not impute any "intentions" to the poet which are at variance with the inherent drift of the play itself, unless there is unmistakable evidence of a rift between intention and execution. That question can not be settled, until we have probed to the bottom of Allmers' character. If we should find that all the words, actions and gestures attributed to Allmers can be viewed as the coherent expression of an individuality, whose inmost soul has lain exposed to the dramatist's scrutiny, then we are bound to infer that he has fully realized his intention. If, on the other hand, we find the character of Allmers to be essentially incongruous; if at times he is

[5] *Ibid.*, 306.

himself and at times merely the mouthpiece of the dramatist—then we are forced to draw a line between intention and realization.

A comparison of the finished play with its first draft *seems*, indeed, to point to such a discrepancy. A single example at this point. In the first draft Allmers, speaking of Eyolf, who is pictured not as a cripple but as something of a sissy, announces the change of his educational policy with the words: "I am going to make a regular open-air boy of him."[6] The Allmers of the final version says exactly the same words with reference to the crippled child (43). In the latter case the remark is absurd, coming as it does on the heels of his announcement that his educational efforts will henceforth be directed to bringing the boy's desires into harmony with what lies attainable before him (35). One's first thought is that Ibsen inadvertently copied the remark out of the original draft, unmindful of the changed circumstances. But is it not possible that he did so deliberately, *that he knew exactly what he was doing?* Assuming the latter, these words will have an entirely different ring. The same, as we shall see, is the case with a good many other phrases transferred bodily from the first draft to the Play. Obviously, we must read the work of a soul-analyst like Ibsen with the assumption that he was familiar with his characters to the very rhythm of their breathing—until, or better, unless we find that this involves us in contradictions. We must let the Play speak for itself and convey its own inherent meaning, if it have one. A comparison between the Play and its first draft is indeed apt to throw a good deal of light on the dramatist's method, on the evolution of the dramatic plan and of the characters; but to use the first draft as a source of light in regard to the

[6] F.I.W., 483.

meaning of the characters as they stand fixed in the Play, is inadmissible—unless they show traces of faulty mechanism.

I now ask the reader to follow me in a detailed analysis of the Play as regards everything that will illuminate the character of Alfred Allmers, who is generally regarded, despite his evident weaknesses, as a mentally and morally superior type of person—"a type of what we may roughly call the 'free moral agent.'"[7] In reality—as I shall try to show—he is only one of that very dangerous kind of charlatans who, in deceiving themselves, also contrive to deceive those who love them. A vain petulant child, humored and coddled by the two women whose lives revolve around his, he takes himself very seriously and has come to conceive of himself as a really profound thinker. He professes to view life only from the moral angle, and while he invariably indulges the impulses of his emotional self, this preoccupation with morality supplies him in all emergencies with fluent phrases and ready formulæ with which to conceal his impulsive egotism from himself and others. I preface my analysis with this plain statement in order to lay down clearly in advance the conclusions to be derived from a multitude of specific instances, which will be taken up one by one. In order to avoid the cumbersome process of induction, I confess that I took Allmers quite seriously at the outset, and that the final note of peace through renunciation, coming from his lips, had for me the ring of sincerity. But what troubled me from the first, aroused my suspicion upon repeated reading, and finally forced me to a radical reinterpretation, was the behavior of Allmers in the second act. One false note there follows another: insincere, exaggerated grief, petulance, hysteria, wilful self-deception, and brutality under the mask

[7] William Archer's introd. XI, xi.

of moral indignation. The analysis here presented will follow the play consecutively; but I venture to suggest that the reader who may be tempted to dismiss my remarks on Act I as unwarranted will feel the force of the argument upon rereading Act II with judicious detachment.

## ACT I

Let us begin by determining the facts of the situation at the opening of the Play, on the day after Allmers' return from the mountains. It is well to get at once, in part at least, the significance of his trip.

Allmers had left home, restless, discontented with himself and with his family (33), because he made no headway on "the great, thick book about Human Responsibility." Returning home, he admits he had thought it would go so easily, when once he got away (11). In that he was disappointed. He was absent for seven weeks and came back immediately after the shock of losing his way in the wilds. As he tells Rita, in recounting this experience toward the close of the Play, the decision to renounce his life work in favor of devoting himself altogether to little Eyolf came to him only when he faced death. "That night sealed my resolution" (141).

What did he do during the interval of seven weeks? He says he spent his time thinking, and he remarks with an air of superior wisdom: "All the best that is in you goes into thinking. What you put on paper is worth very little" (12).

The student, who knows the great extent to which Ibsen gleaned the psychic raw material of his characters through self-analysis, will at once discern in this remark a pessimistic utterance of Ibsen's own, having its roots in his convic-

tion that his achievements were never adequate to his endeavors; *and I do not for a moment doubt that the remark originally shaped itself in Ibsen's mind and was jotted down as a bit of personal confession.* Moreover, the moment this fact is recognized, the character of Allmers will tend to establish itself in the mind of the reader as an emanation of Ibsen's self, as an imaginative projection of one of the poet's many possibilities of selfhood, like Solness, the master-builder, and Rubek, the sculptor, like Brand and Skule and Julian and a host of other character creations who are intuitively felt as spiritual kinsmen of Ibsen,—a fact which automatically elevates them above the other characters of the respective plays and makes our sympathies converge upon them. However, when subsequent events tend to show that our sympathies have been misplaced, when once our suspicions have been aroused as to Allmers' intellectual honesty, when once we have detected his inveterate habit of self-deceptive reconstruction of the facts in accordance with his wishes, then we will see in his solemn remark not a glint of wisdom but an evasion of the ugly fact that his ability had failed him. Then our answer as to what he did during those seven weeks will be: Chafing at his failure, he worked himself up into a fit of impotent frenzy, and his getting lost was but the culmination of a self-torture that must have brought him to the brink of madness. It was a crisis brought on by mental exhaustion. If this view of the case is borne out in the course of the analysis, then it is evident that a *startling change of plan separates the finished play from Ibsen's original intention.*

After announcing that he has given up his life work in favor of the boy, Allmers continues confidently, smiling and stroking the boy's hair: "But I can tell you, some one is coming after me who will do it better" (12). Obviously,

he thinks of the boy as his successor. Yet, a little later in the course of the morning, he says to Rita and Asta: "Eyolf shall carry on my life work—if he wants to. Or he shall choose one that is altogether his own. Perhaps that would be best. At all events, I shall let mine rest as it is" (36). Is not this a surprisingly quick change of front, coming from a man who has pondered over these matters and come to a decision, in the great solitude? Does it not fill us with uneasiness, as to the continuity of his purposes? Is this a serious thinker who is changing the course of his life, after mature reflection, or a volatile enthusiast who zig-zags along, yielding to the inspiration of fitful fancies?

To the boy's question, as to what he intends to do when the successor has come, Allmers replies: "(Seriously.) Then I will go to the mountains again—up to the peaks and the great waste places" (13).—Does he mean this literally, or symbolically? Who knows? No one would speak that way, in an intimate family circle, except a prophet,—or a fool with a much inflated sense of self-importance. The intonation is either one of somber gravity or of vacuous pomposity. As yet we don't know Allmers well enough to decide which it is, but after we do, this incident will contribute a pronounced touch of color to our mental picture of him.

Now consider Allmers' announcement that he will make a regular open-air boy out of Eyolf. Before Allmers went on his trip, Eyolf, "poor little white-faced boy" (9) had been a slave to his books. His mother, though she didn't love the child, had felt a deep pity for him (50) because she felt that Allmers wanted to make a prodigy of him by forcing his mental development (92). Also Asta, the boy's aunt, has become alarmed at the length of his lessons, so that she makes up her mind to say a word of warning

to Allmers on that subject (9).[8] The boy had not been in the habit of playing like other children. But during the weeks of the father's absence the frequent visits of the cheerful Road-Builder gave his child's soul a chance to assert itself. Now he learned to shoot with a bow and arrow in the garden, and he nursed the pathetic ambition of becoming a soldier. The father, all eager after his return to take up the child's education in an entirely new spirit, winces as the little fellow gives vent to his hopes, and his voice throbs with emotion as he says, rising to emphasize his words: "I will help him to bring his desires into harmony with what is attainable before him. That is just what at present they are not" (35). This, as a resolution to make the boy happy, will pass muster. But its application in the announcement that he will make a regular open-air boy of the child (43), is all the more obviously quixotic. By throwing all the emphasis on cultivating the boy's love of out-of-doors, as he proposes to do, he is going to encourage those very desires in the boy which, owing to his crippled condition, can never be fulfilled; hence he will be working in direct contradiction to his formula of happiness. So these words reveal not the thoughtful father but the sanguine enthusiast.[9]

Asta has brought a portfolio containing, among other family letters, those belonging to her mother, Allmers' stepmother. To her suggestion that he read them, he replies:

[8] Instead of being a father, Allmers had been only a schoolmaster to him (34). "You kept him reading and grinding at books," Rita says reproachfully to Allmers in the course of the morning. "You scarcely even saw him." "No," Allmers agrees, nodding slowly; "I was blind. The time had not yet come for me" (50).

[9] Does not Allmers' pronouncement, "Eyolf shall be the complete man of our race. And it shall be my new life work to make him the complete man" (36) show that Allmers prefers theories to facts, that he is himself quite unable to harmonize his desires with what is attainable?

"Those, of course, you must keep yourself.—*Asta* (With an effort.) No; I am determined that you shall look them through too, Alfred.—*Allmers.* I shall never read your mother's letters in any case" (28). Why does he refuse? The first answer that suggests itself to me is that his sense of honor forbids him to trespass upon her mother's secrets. Is this an indication of extreme sensitiveness—or of moral pedantry? Asta is certainly a woman of great tact and refinement, yet *she* does not feel her request as any betrayal of trust! But, perhaps, the moral issue is put forward merely as a cover to obviate his saying: "I do not care to read them. They would bore me." There is nothing to indicate that his declining to read them might be prompted by any vague suspicion regarding Asta's parentage. Be that as it may, the incident shows how carefully every word of his must be weighed in the balance.

Both Rita and Asta are struck with the solemnity of Allmers' manner. Asta remarks that something seems to have happened to Allmers—transformed him, as it were. "*Rita.* Yes, I saw it the moment you came. A change for the better, I hope, Alfred?—*Allmers.* It ought to be for the better. And it must and shall come to good." And as she insists, eagerly, to know what has happened, Allmers admits: "It is true that within me there has been something of a revolution.—*Rita.* Oh, Heavens!—*Allmers.* (Soothingly, patting her head.) Only for the better, my dear Rita. You may be perfectly certain of that" (29-30). Contrast the "it *ought* to be for the better" of the first part of the dialogue, with the "you may be perfectly certain" of the conclusion. The uneasy doubt of the former gives way in a few seconds' space to his imperious will-to-believe. These words, again, get their color from the personality of the man who utters them. In the mouth of a man of great de-

termination they serve notice of a struggle to be won by sheer grit of will; in the mouth of a weakling they mark only the short-lived escape from the hard world of fact to the pliable realm of fancy. Is Allmers' will but the flickering of a match, or is it the steady burning of a "hard, gem-like flame?"

Allmers motivates his decision to give up his book as follows: "I felt as though I were positively abusing—or, say rather, wasting—my best powers—frittering away the time.—*Asta.* (With wide eyes.) When you were writing at your book?—*Allmers.* (Nodding.) For I cannot think that my powers are confined to that alone. I must surely have it in me to do one or two things as well" (32). If, like the hero of the original draft, Allmers could say of himself: "Book after book I have sent out into the world. They were well done, I believe,"[10] such positive proof of his ability would establish his right to be believed. But, to leave a ten years' task, a life work, without anything accomplished, makes one suspect that he is sugar-coating his consciousness of failure with fine phrases, both to hush up his uneasiness and to throw dust into the eyes of the two doting women. If he succeeds in deluding himself, as well as others, so much the worse for him. But his fine phrases no longer deceive Rita after hot anger has sharpened her vision. In Act II she tells him why he gave up his book. Not for Eyolf's sake, but "because you were consumed with mistrust of yourself. Because you had begun to doubt whether you had any great vocation to live for in the world." To which Allmers, unable to form words of denial, replies, "(Observing her closely.) Could you see that in me?" (91). Which goes to prove that he had—very nearly—succeeded in deluding himself.

[10] F.I.W., 479.

But, as if uneasily realizing the weakness of his position, he hastens to explain that he cannot divide himself between the book and Eyolf. "It is impossible! I cannot divide myself in this matter—and therefore I efface myself" (36). The utter ridiculousness of this flourish, a grotesque misapplication of Brand's maxim: "All or Nothing," must strike any one upon a little reflection. Even Rita's ear caught the reverberating echo of its hollowness; for as Allmers, with theatrical solemnity, takes hold of Rita's hand and holds out his other to Asta, and announces that with both of them to help him he will act out his human responsibility in his own life (37), Rita, drawing her hand away, retorts: "Ah —with both of us! So, after all, you *can* divide yourself" (38). Which causes Allmers' mood of moral edification to end abruptly in a perplexed stammer. But he forgets quickly. Again the fatal phrase is used, to tell Rita that she can no longer kindle his passion: *"Rita.* But you shall be mine alone! You shall be wholly mine! That I have a right to demand of you!—*Allmers.* (Shrugging his shoulders.) Oh, my dear Rita, it is of no use demanding anything. Everything must be freely given.—*Rita.* (Looks anxiously at him.) And that you cannot do henceforth? —*Allmers.* No, I cannot. I must divide myself between Eyolf and you" (48).

Allmers speaks of his life work not as *a* book on human responsibility, but as "the great thick book on Human Responsibility" (33). Is not malicious comment justified, when the greatness of a still unwritten, never-to-be-written, book is emphasized by its thickness? Surely that book deserves its place, along with other moth-eaten treasures, in the chest of Ulrik Brendel!

Again, how different would be the allusion to the great thick book in the mouth of a man who, like the hero of the

original draft, had already sent book after book into the world and, in wrestling with his masterpiece, suddenly found his theories crumbling because of a tragic fundamental error!

Allmers begins his account of the transformation that overcame him in the mountains with a rather long-winded and pompous introduction, designed as a tribute of gratitude to Rita because of her "gold and her green forests" which had brought the poor scholar comfort and leisure (31-33). Rita is annoyed; she finds this unctuous beginning, this ostentatious harping on his gratitude, in very bad taste. I think any healthy-minded person would find it equally so. Allmers here betrays a lack of tact and delicacy, quite out of keeping with his seeming hypersensitiveness when the reading of his stepmother's letters was at issue. And indeed we learn later that this embarrassing profession of gratitude was meant as a sop to ease his conscience for having married Rita because of her wealth. Again the line between sincerity and insincerity is hard to draw. Who can tell how much he resented having to be grateful to her?

How Allmers proposes to live out his human responsibility instead of putting it into a book—of that we have a striking instance in his concern on Asta's behalf. It would disquiet him, he admits, if Asta seriously cared for Borgheim. "You must remember," he tells Rita, "that I am responsible for Asta—for her life's happiness" (45). Later we find that Allmers' attachment for Asta breaks into passionate flame when he learns that she is not his sister. He had been secretly jealous of Borgheim all the time, but he had managed to deceive himself on that score by investing his selfish feelings with the mantle of moral responsibility. Of course, even the best of men have these human-all-to-human failings; even the most passionate lover of

truth will catch himself, often enough, in intellectual equivocation. So we must not judge Allmers by a single instance. However, if we find a will to self-deception to be one of the man's ingrained habits, we must take his measure accordingly. And we must judge him all the more severely because he is the self-appointed spokesman of an austere morality.

At the risk of offending the puritanical, we must dwell for a moment on Allmers' behavior at the lugubrious reunion feast of the night before, when Rita, preparing to greet him, had let down her "fragrant tresses," donned a dress of pure white and put the champagne on the table. Allmers refused to touch it, and when Rita undressed, he asked her about the boy's digestion. So they parted for the night. On the morning of the Play, having been plainly told that henceforth she would come in for the attentions of her husband only in a secondary degree, that his former passion was to be replaced by "a calm, deep tenderness" (50), Rita rehearses the events of the night before in a manner which must be extremely offensive to English ears; at least on no other ground can I explain Edmund Gosse's extraordinary comment: "She seems the most vigorous, and, it must be added, the most repulsive of Ibsen's feminine creations." [11] Now, in truth, it is difficult to show a woman in a more disadvantageous light, than by letting her go through the futile motions of reproaching her husband for not having snatched her up in his arms on a previous occasion. Apart from the fact that nothing is ever gained by such wrangling, such abandonment of her pride of sex is bound to lower her in our estimation, and our sympathies quite naturally side with the man. But it would be unfair to her to forget that she was not at all used to

[11] *Life of Ibsen*, 197.

seeing her passion spurned. For ten years she had revelled in her husband's passionate embraces; they had never been separated for a single day (1). The telegram came, announcing his unexpected return in an hour. How her heart must have fluttered in anticipation of his embrace! So, without a touch of coquetry, without the slightest artful attempt to stimulate his passion by disguising her own, simple in her gladness like a child of nature, she had welcomed him to the feast—and he had entered, looking as if transfigured as he stood in the doorway (6); but, still completely under the spell of his recent experience, feeling more like a saint than a mortal man, he had been distant and solemn, refusing both the wine and her charms. Now, as I view the situation, Allmers felt exalted because of his great moral experience in the mountains, he felt a thrill of satisfaction because the divine spark of his nature had triumphed over his lower self, and he retired, absorbed in a wave of heretofore unknown self-esteem that left no room for his considering the feelings of such lower creatures of sense as Rita. Poor Rita, on the other hand, feeling the distance of his manner, the cause of which she did not know, saw her rosy expectations fade, sick with hope deferred. But she respected his mood, she bore him no grudge. "He seemed to be tired enough. . . . Poor fellow, he had come on foot the greater part of the way" (6). And she is all gladness the next morning in chatting to Asta about his return.

Summing up the results of our study of Allmers' character as revealed in the first act, we have seen a number of striking instances of wilful self-deception that point to an ingrained habit; we have come across clear instances of his voice being pitched in a false key, leading us to question his sincerity; but at the same time we have found it neces-

sary to stress the equivocal character of a great deal of the evidence we have sifted. After all, he may be sincere at bottom. He may be slowly groping his way through error to the light for which he professes to yearn. Perhaps we are to witness his purification under the impact of a great sorrow.

## ACT II

Little Eyolf, succumbing to the fascination of the Rat-Wife, followed her with his eyes as he stood at the edge of the pier, until he reeled and plunged into the clear deep water, to be swept toward the sea by the swift undertow. The shock of his death leaves Allmers stunned. Twenty-eight hours after the accident Asta finds him sitting by himself in a narrow glen overlooking the fjord. He stares fixedly at the water which is steeped in an atmosphere of gloom because of the low wet mists. Presumably he had been brooding thus continuously since the child's death, shunning the company of Rita and Asta, except when he joined them at meals.

In the scene between Asta and Allmers which follows, Allmers gives an exhibition of his grief. I think that any one who reads this scene discerningly must feel that Allmers' expression of his sorrow is a "tour de force." More than a day had elapsed since the accident, time enough, one should think, for a sincerely sorrowing parent,—let alone a philosopher—to regain a certain degree of outward composure. Notwithstanding, Allmers acts as if he were still physically paralyzed by the shock. Asta has to address him repeatedly before he will answer her questions (64). Then he bursts forth in a flood of meaningless questions and exclamations. He keeps turning the knife in his

wound, trying to recall by his every word the first physical horror. He would make Asta—and himself—believe that grief is driving him to the brink of madness, as he performs the horrible mathematical calculation of time multiplied by velocity, to determine the present location of Eyolf's body (66).

And then his question: "Can you conceive the meaning of a thing like this?—Of this that has been done to Rita and me" (66). How childish on the part of a man claiming to be a philosopher who has broken with the theistic view of the world! So childish, in fact, that Asta finds it difficult to get the drift of his question. So all his philosophy has been only a thin veneer; for the moment his own life is touched by fate, he instinctively fancies himself the center of the universe. His words make it quite plain that he conceives the death of Eyolf as a spiteful act on the part of some conscious superior power,—an act which he feels directed against himself far more than against the child. How unguardedly his egotism comes out in his exclamation: "He would have filled my life with pride and gladness!" (67). How these words *my life* echo the false key in which his lamentation is pitched!

He continues to reason like the spoiled petulant child that he is. "(Impatiently.) Yes, the meaning, I say. For, after all, there must be a meaning in it. Life, existence—destiny, *cannot* be so utterly meaningless" (66). That fine generalization is to supply the logical prop for his airing of a personal grievance. The sophistry is too blatant to warrant discussion. We can imagine with what superior gravity he would have doled out metaphysical comfort to some other parent who had sustained a similar loss.

But as the philosopher in Allmers shrinks and shrivels, the theologian underneath waxes. "There is no retribu-

tion behind it. Nothing to be atoned for, I mean" (68). That seems to be settled as soon as he goes through the motions of reasoning out that the child had done no harm to the Rat-Wife. But now we perceive why he talks about the meaning! Despite his being, apparently, a free-thinker, the only causality he knows how to reckon with is moral. What a sorry fool he must be, to carry all the luggage of medieval theology and yet to discard the personal god, the logical keystone of the whole system!

Allmers is hopelessly enmeshed in self-deception. "Have you spoken to Rita of these things?" Asta asks. To which Allmers replies, shaking his head: "I feel as if I can talk better to you about them" (68). He knows well why he avoids talking to Rita about retribution; for all his words have had only the aim of downing the conviction, which he knows Rita must share, that Eyolf's death is a personal visitation of Providence upon them for having neglected the child in the indulgence of their sensuous passion. It is easier for him to talk to Asta about it, since she is ignorant of the circumstances which caused the boy to become a cripple.

Allmers' state of mind gives us a clue as to the reason for his exaggerated, ostentatious show of grief. Or rather the reasons. First, he wants to persuade himself by the vehemence of his hysterical clamoring that he felt genuine love for the boy, because a father *ought* to love his child. Second, as he is weighed down by the consciousness of guilt, he feels there is a certain moral atonement in making the grief hurt him to the very limit of his capacity. Feeling the grief of bereavement in all its acuteness restores to him the sense of his own moral superiority: A person of less highly developed moral sense would suffer less. Finally, there seems to be another subtle reason for his grieving.

If, as seems clear, Allmers "effaced" himself in favor of the boy and renounced his life work, because his ability failed him, how is he going to hide that fact from himself now that the child can no longer serve as a cover for his failure to stick to his task?

As Asta sews some crêpe on his arm, Allmers' mind slips from the forced leash-hold of its sorrow, reverting to scenes where it can dwell with pleasure. He begins to talk about the happy days of their adolescence. Reminded by him of how she used to dress in his clothes and pretend to be his boy chum, when they were alone, Asta pauses, in thinking of his college days, to remark, smiling involuntarily: "I wonder how you could be so childish.—*Allmers.* Was it *I* that was childish?—*Asta.* Yes, indeed, I think it was, as I look back upon it all. You were ashamed of having no brother—only a sister.—*Allmers.* No, No, it was you, dear—*you* were ashamed.—*Asta.* Oh, yes, I too, perhaps—a little" (73). Note the unguarded spontaneity of Allmers': "Was it *I* that was childish?" How it reveals in the flash of a moment the man's vanity! [12]

Asta, realizing that she has nettled his self-love by imputing something childish to the past of so great a man, yields the point in order to soothe him. But this bit of dialogue reveals even more. If Allmers felt in a way ashamed of Asta, because she was only a sister instead of a brother, the egotistical nature of the only love of which he was capable betrays itself. He instinctively looked upon her as an item of his personal aggrandizement, as he would have looked upon money or social station. She was to him essentially a thing which contributed to his sense of self-

[12] Just like Torvald Helmer, who flares up when Nora dares to suggest that his motive for wanting to discharge Krogstad is petty ("smaalig")—only infinitely more subtle!

importance, yet did not do so quite enough; a substitute which he had to make the best of.

Once we have appreciated this *nuance* of Allmers' egotism, we also understand his lack of delicacy, otherwise puzzling, in confiding to Rita the precious intimacy between himself and Asta, as symbolized by Asta's being to him his "big brother Eyolf." To Asta the precious secret was like a sanctum into which none but them were privileged to enter. "Oh, Alfred, I hope you have never told Rita this?—*Allmers*. Yes, I believe I did once tell her.—*Asta*. Oh, Alfred, how could you do that?—*Allmers*. Well, you see—one tells one's wife everything—very nearly" (74). How she would have blushed hot with shame and indignation, had she known that Allmers chose for this communication that passionate hour, when he neglected his watch over the sleeping child—in the arms of Rita! (104).

But we must linger over that tactless indiscretion for a moment, since it contains the key to another secret. What could have brought the memory of those days of adolescence to his mind during "that entrancingly beautiful hour?" (104). Without doubt it was the thought of his fine healthy baby boy, whom he had fondled on the table after his bath until the child dropped off to sleep. How proud he felt of this Eyolf, after having had to put up so long with—what was after all—a mere make-believe Eyolf; how elated at his own achievement! And in a burst of paternal pride, which wiped out completely the clinging vestiges of shame-faced embarrassment over Asta's mere girlhood, his expanding heart craved for a partner in its naïve triumph, and he told Rita why he had given their child the name of Eyolf. Now we can fully appreciate, in turn, the mingled feelings of disappointed vanity, physical repulsion and self-reproach which the child must have evoked in All-

mers after it bore its permanent disability. Despite the forced educational drill which he imposed upon the mild docile youngster, he scarcely even looked at him (50). He did not dare to!

With a start, clutching his forehead, Allmers cuts through his reminiscent conversation with Asta (when her question, about his betrayal of their secret to Rita, had exposed a sore spot of his conscience!), to return to the grim present. He realizes that he had forgotten his grief for little Eyolf, in talking with Asta, and he now reproaches himself violently for this lack of feeling,—always with the thought lurking in the back of his mind: What a superior moral being I am, despite my weakness, to expose and judge my own failings with such unflinching honesty! This thought inspires him to an ever greater exhibition of grief, coming to a climax in a grand theatrical flourish: He threatens to commit suicide by jumping into the fjord. Once the comic element of this scene is detected, his antics are felt as irresistibly grotesque. Allmers complains in self-reproach: "He slipped out of my memory—out of my thoughts. I did not see him for a moment as we sat here talking. I utterly forgot him all that time.—*Asta.* But surely you must take some rest in your sorrow.—*Allmers.* No, no, no; that is just what I will not do! I must not—I have no right—and no heart for it, either. (Going in great excitement towards the right.) All my thoughts must be out there, where he lies drifting in the depths!—*Asta.* (Following him and holding him back.) Alfred—Alfred! Don't go to the fjords.—*Allmers.* (Yielding.) No, no—I will not. Only let me alone.—*Asta.* (Leading him back to the table.) You must rest from your thoughts, Alfred. Come here and sit down.—*Allmers.* (Making as if to seat himself on the bench.) Well, well, as you please.—*Asta.* No, I

won't let you sit there.—*Allmers.* Yes, let me.—*Asta.* No, don't. For then you will only sit looking out—(Forces him down upon a chair, with his back to the right.) There now. Now that's right. (Seats herself upon the bench.) And now we can talk a little again" (75-6). So Allmers settles down to a less hysterical, more reflective variation of the theme of self-reproach, culminating in the confession: "In the midst of all the agony, I found myself speculating what we should have for dinner to-day" (77). As Woerner remarks, not the fact that he confesses to the human weakness of hunger in his misery, but that he should be wondering *what* he would get for dinner, brings him within the radius of Hjalmar Ekdal.

Gradually self-reproach subsides into sentimental reflection. Dwelling on the theme of his love for Asta—his sister—of his own kin, unlike Rita, he philosophizes on the bond wrought by common family traits: "Yes, our family is a thing apart. (Half jestingly.) We have always had vowels for our initials. Don't you remember how often we used to speak of that? And all our relations—all equally poor. And we have all the same color of eyes." Upon the modulations of this elegiac strain Asta breaks in with her question: "Do you think I too have?" (78). Which jars the harmony of finely spun theories a trifle by the rude impact of fact, causing him hastily to correct himself. However, being now in the mood, he tranquilly continues after a moment: "But all the same—"

Rita arrives with Borgheim; and as Asta departs with the Road-Builder, to leave the couple alone, a mood of dogged sullenness settles down upon Allmers. A moment before their arrival he had exclaimed to Asta: "But how I am to get over these terrible first days (hoarsely) that is what I cannot imagine" (81). Now, when Rita asks him:

"Can you think the thought, Alfred, that we have lost Eyolf?" he answers, "(Looking sadly at the ground.) We must accustom ourselves to it" (85).

Rita tells him with streaming eyes the details she had gleaned, down at the wharf, of the child's death. Like Ellida Wangel, she is a creature of sense, thinking wholly in images, visual and auditory. "I shall see him day and night," she wails. "With great open eyes. I see them! I see them now" (87). These words give Allmers the cue for which he has been sullenly waiting. Rising slowly and looking at her with quiet menace, "Were they evil, those eyes, Rita?" he asks (87); and as she shrinks from her pitiless accuser, he follows her, repeating the question with rising emphasis. Then, seeing his victim, shrieking with helpless dread, recoil before him, he strikes: "Now things have come about—just as you wished, Rita" (88).

The sheer, deliberate brutality of this blow exposes the man's unspeakable pettiness. He knows that his accusation is only half true, at the most; Rita had checked herself from uttering the wish that formed in her mind when she was beside herself in a frenzy of jealousy. He knows how those wide open eyes haunt her; how she is suffering because of that wish. One would expect him, appalled at the ghastliness of her fate, to wring his hands in mute agony for being unable to find words that could free her from her dread obsession. Instead, he finds solace for his own pangs of conscience in lacerating his stricken wife.

Yet his cruelty is unwittingly merciful. Where sympathy would have made her self-annihilation but the more complete, the voice of pitiless judgment, coming from an accomplice in guilt, spurs her to self-defense in salutory anger. Indignation lends her the keenness to penetrate in part the drapery of his moral superiority. She confronts

him with facts which he had been too clever in his cowardly self-delusion to acknowledge to himself: He had never really loved the boy; he had given up his work because he was consumed with mistrust of himself; he needed something new to fill up his life, and she was no longer enough for him (93). Taken wholly by surprise by her counterattack, fearing its more vehement renewal if he sought cover under denial, he tries to regain the upper hand by retreating behind the phraseology of science, where the Particular can escape the mere lay person's pursuit by letting itself be swallowed up in the awe-inspiring Universal, enjoying there the immunity of the outlaw in the temple. Had Allmers said, "Yes, Rita, I have changed toward you," he would have felt uneasily on the defensive. But his solemn pronouncement, "That is the law of change, Rita" (92), substitutes for the Particular a Universal, from which there seems to be no appeal. Poor Rita did not see through the word-fetishism of his pseudoscience, but her *élan* had been impetuous enough to let her clear the hurdle which Allmers threw in her path. She goes on with her accusations, and imperceptibly the guilty pair find themselves confronted, in their recriminations, by an issue which they had avoided for years by tacit agreement: Their responsibility for the crippling of the child and thereby indirectly for his death stares them in the face.

Once more Allmers makes a frantic effort to rise above Rita by trampling upon her. "You are the guilty one in this," he shouts at her. "It was your fault that he could not save himself when he fell into the water" (93).—*Rita.* (With a gesture of repulsion.) Alfred, you *shall* not throw the blame upon me!—*Allmers.* (More and more beside himself.) Yes, yes, I do! It was you that left the helpless child unwatched upon the table.—*Rita.* He was ly-

ing so comfortably among the cushions, and sleeping so soundly. And you had promised to look after him.—*Allmers.* Yes, I had. (Lowering his voice.) But then you came—you, you, and lured me to you.—*Rita.* (Looking defiantly at him.) Oh, better own at once that you forgot the child and everything else.—*Allmers.* (In suppressed desperation.) Yes, that is true. (Lower.) I forgot the child—in your arms.—*Rita.* (Exasperated.) Alfred! Alfred—this is intolerable of you!—*Allmers.* (In a low voice, clenching his fists before her face.) In that hour you condemned your little Eyolf to death." (94).—It is the old story of Adam and Eve, with Adam, trying to shift the whole blame upon his wife, by far the more repulsive sinner.[13] But the facts are too plain. Allmers is reluctantly forced to yield his ground, to admit his share in their common sin. He even finds a certain satisfaction in demonstrating to Rita, in superior schoolmaster fashion, the child's death as an act of retribution.

If we but listen closely, we detect in his apparent contrition new evidence of his inveterate habit of evading unpleasant facts. "Now, as we stand here," Allmers says, "we have our deserts. While he lived, we let ourselves shrink away from him in secret, abject remorse.[14] We could not bear to see it—the thing he had to drag with him—. —*Rita* (Whispers.) The crutch.—*Allmers.* Yes, that" (95). Even now he shrinks from mentioning that repulsive thing, the crutch, by name. Like Peer Gynt he prefers to "go roundabout" or use the pronoun, in contrast to Rita's simple truthfulness![15]

[13] Is his brutality lessened any by the fact that the mother's responsibility for the child was, after all, the greater?

[14] An admission, at last, that he had not loved the boy!

[15] Cf. Act III, p. 135. *"Rita.* Only the crutch was saved.—*Allmers.* Be silent! Do not let me hear that word."

We have another, less subtle but even more striking instance of this habit of evasion on the next page. Allmers tells Rita of his dream of the night before in which he saw little Eyolf alive and well like any other child. Then: "Oh, how I thanked and blessed (Checking himself.) H'm!—*Rita.* (Looking at him.) Whom?—*Allmers.* (Evasively.) Whom?—*Rita.* Yes; whom did you thank and bless?—*Allmers.* (Putting aside the question.) I was only dreaming, you know.—*Rita.* One whom you yourself do not believe in?—*Allmers.* That was how I felt, all the same. Of course, I was sleeping—" (96). Is it more despicable or more childish, that a man who poses as a philosopher and a free-thinker should have such a phobia of the name of God that he shrinks from mentioning it even when it forms an element of a mere dream? It shows, of course, that having been taught at college to deny the existence of God, his feeling has not developed apace with his learning. He feels ashamed of the fact and even more self-conscious about admitting the fact—just as he had done when Asta reminded him of his having felt ashamed for having only a sister but no brother.

When Rita reproaches him for having taken her faith away from her (96), he gravely corrects her by propounding a series of questions based on hypotheses about a future life which, from his free-thinker's standpoint, were purely academic; and he concludes with his Q.E.D., that both he and Rita are creatures of the earth and that no inducements could tempt them voluntarily to cross the bridge of death (97-9). Poor Rita! His argument sounded so learned. She was no logician, and his questions clearly suggested the answers he expected. It was a clever move on his part, for was it not a step toward reinstating

him in his position of wise teacher and philosophical guide to her? [16]

With their guilt acknowledged, the craving for atonement makes itself felt. As their natures are different, so they think of atonement in very different terms—Rita, in terms of positive action, making good; Allmers in terms of punitive asceticism. "I feel as if all this must end in despair—in madness for both of us," Rita exclaims. "For we can never—never make it good again" (95). "There must always be a dead wall between us two, from this time forth," says Allmers. "Who knows but that a child's great open eyes are watching us day and night.—Our love has been like a consuming fire. Now it must be quenched—. It is dead, Rita. But in what I now feel for you—in our common guilt and need of atonement—I seem to foresee a sort of resurrection" (101). Rita is right in exclaiming: "Imprisoned for life—in anguish and remorse!" (102), for that is what Allmers understands by atonement. Fancy him in his rôle of keeper, glowering and argus-eyed, quick to trample under foot each modest blossom of happiness that might venture to peep from time to time above the devastated ground of Rita's heart!

One more fact we learn of Allmers' past during this terrible intimate talk between husband and wife. Despite Rita's beauty, Allmers' first reaction to her had been one of dread—an instinctive aversion on the part of the mild-

[16] A second reason for his hypothesis ("But suppose now I went to Eyolf? And you had the fullest assurance that you would meet both him and me there. Then would you come over to us?"): He means to suggest that he may commit suicide. Of course, he doesn't entertain the idea seriously; for as soon as she answers that much as she would want to, she could not, he adds: "Nor I." But he puts the hypothesis in order to torture her with the thought, developed later, that she may lose him too.

eyed, thin-haired man for the highly sexed woman. But her wealth, holding out the prospect of comfort and ease and leisure to pursue his studies, had decided the issue. He admits the fact now, under her searching glance, but he puts forward a reason which lends the color of altruism and self-sacrifice to his act. "I had Asta to think of" (103). Again we marvel at the complex ramifications of his self-delusion. As if his love for Asta could excuse his having used Rita as a mere means—if what he says is true! But as we have seen that even his love for Asta was an essentially selfish affair, it is clear that, in marrying Rita, he had merely used Asta as a convenient cover to justify gratifying his own desires.

Asta and Borgheim return. They again change partners. With Asta as a sympathetic listener, Allmers is once more the petulant child. He talks of getting away far from everything here and standing quite alone in the world. To which Asta, knowing his dependence on feminine solicitude, remarks: "But you are not fitted for living alone" (107). All the more sickening is the cant of his rejoinder: "I will come to you—my dear, dear sister. I must come to you again—home to you, to be purified and ennobled after my life with— —*Asta.* (Shocked.) *Alfred,*—you are doing Rita a great wrong!—*Allmers.* I have done her a great wrong. But not in this!" . (108).

To put a check on Allmers' insistence that he will rejoin her, Asta tells him the secret she had gleaned from her mother's letters. A moment earlier Allmers had fortified his impulse to return to Asta by the philosophical reflection that the love of brother and sister is the only relation in life that is not subject to the law of change (108). Now, on learning that she is not his sister, he replies: "(Quickly, half defiantly, looking at her.) Well, but what

difference does that really make in our relation? Practically none at all" (110). We leave Allmers at the end of the second act, no longer with distrust, but with contempt mixed with scarcely a grain of pity. Is it conceivable that this weakling, whose native element is subterfuge, should be on the eve of a genuine spiritual regeneration?

### ACT III

The third act brings together the three principals of the Play, and Borgheim with them in Allmers' garden.[17] For Asta is now one of the principals, fighting a silent battle within herself, whether to go or to stay, now that she knows how Allmers yearns for her. The temptation is real, for though there is discernible in her love for him a distinct tinge of motherliness, she has also felt the stirring of passion since the taboo of blood relationship had been lifted. With habitual dishonesty, which we now take as a matter of course, Allmers pleads: "Asta, I beg you—for Heaven's sake—remain here with Rita!" (128). Contrast this with Rita's sincerity, as, learning to renounce exclusiveness of possession in love, she joins in his plea: "Yes! And with Alfred too. Do!" (128). She is willing to share him, now that the terror of losing him altogether is upon her. She, who knew why Allmers had given her little boy the name of Eyolf, beseeches her rival to "take Eyolf's place" (129) in their household. But that very phrase, so generously meant, makes Asta shrink back and seals her decision to go. A foreboding tells her that, like the dead boy, her presence would be a festering sore in that family. For she knows—Allmers' hints of that were unmistakable (127, 129)

[17] At first only Asta and Borgheim are together. They are joined later by Allmers, finally by Rita.

—that his feelings toward her are also no longer those of a brother. She leaves with Borgheim, in flight from Allmers and from herself (130), and passes out of the Drama.

"Asta is gone," says Allmers, feeling that this door of escape from Rita has been closed in his face. "Then I suppose you will soon be gone too, Alfred," says Rita, following up his moody remark. "*Allmers.* (Quickly.) What do you mean by that?—*Rita.* That you will follow your sister.—*Allmers.* Has Asta told you anything?—*Rita.* No. But you said yourself it was for Asta's sake that—that we came together.—*Allmers.* Yes, but you, you yourself have bound me to you—by our life together" (135). Truly, he knows the art of making a virtue out of necessity! Asta gone, there was only Rita to fall back on. He was not made to live without a woman to minister to his comfort. Asta had told him so, though less bluntly (107). It was out of the question, of course, for him to admit this to Rita as his reason for staying, hence his unctuous gravity, further reinforced by the philosophical reflection: "The law of change may perhaps keep us together, none the less" (135). Substitute for "the law of change" "the law of inertia," and we have the fact, without its moral veneer. But Rita, loving him more well than wisely, clinging to him with the irrational tenacity of long established love, cares little about his reasons, so long as he does not abandon her to dread solitude.

Rita is aware that a change is going on within her, rending her with an anguish akin to the pangs of childbirth. "Change, too, is a sort of birth," she says. "It is," Allmers replies, "or a resurrection. Transition to a higher life.—*Rita.* (Gazing sadly before her.) Yes—with the loss of all, all life's happiness.—*Allmers.* That loss is just the gain" (136). How hollow, how fatuous, in the mouth

of a moral crank, are these words; how tinny their ring when set over against the identical sentiment that took form on the lips of the stern fighter Brand, as he beheld Agnes expiring under the searing fire of his insupportable idealism!

> Sjael, vaer trofast til det sidste!
> Sejrens sejr er alt at miste.
> Tabets alt din vinding skabte;—
> evigt ejes kun det tabte! [18]

Meanwhile Rita's mind is at work searching for some active pursuit to fill the gap left by Eyolf's death. This is a symptom of an essentially healthy constitution. Allmers, on the other hand, is content to cultivate his remorse, showing thereby that there is something spiritually *vermoulu* about him, just as there was something physically *vermoulu* about Oswald Alving. Thus Rita suggests to him that he take up his work again. She is now willing to share him with his work, humbly admitting that she will make any concession to keep him near her. To which he replies with smug condescension: "Oh, it is so little I can do to help you, Rita." And when she persists in cautiously feeling her way forward, by offering the suggestion that she might, perhaps, be of some help to him, he nips that venture by the bilious phrase: "I seem to have no life left to live" (137).

There is nothing left for a mind like Allmers' to do but to move in a circle. So he returns to his earlier idea that it would be best for him to leave her. He talks of going back "up into the solitudes." However, Rita's practical mind refuses to be deceived by such a flourish. "But all that is mere dreaming, Alfred," she counters. "You could not live up there" (138). So, to reprove her, to make her

[18] Samlede Vaerker, 1898; vol. III.

feel the unfathomable superiority of his soul over hers, he communicates to her, in the grave and simple language of a revelation, his great experience in the mountains.

After finding himself lost in the wilds, he "reveled in the peace and luxury of death" (140). "Here went death and I, it seemed to me, like two good fellow-travelers. It all seemed so natural—so simple, I thought. In my family, we don't live to be old—. That night sealed my resolution. And it was then that I turned about and came straight homewards. To Eyolf" (141).

The account of this experience related by Allmers is one of those "revelations" which are a favorite technical device of Ibsen's analytical plays. We find the most notable cases of such self-revelation in "The Master-Builder" and, in an even more pronounced way, in "Rosmersholm." In these two plays those self-revelations supply the keystones around which our interpretation of Solness' and Rebecca's characters must be built. Is that also the case with Allmers?

Yes, and no. This self-revelation *does* supply the key to the strangeness, the solemnity of his manner (which did not escape Rita's and Asta's notice) upon his return from the mountains. It also explains, as we shall presently see, his resolution to devote himself henceforth undividedly to little Eyolf. On the other hand, this account of Allmers' can not in the least change our firmly established estimate of his personality, on the contrary, it *provides but a new instance of the man's will to self-delusion.* Rita is absolutely right in divining that he has reconstructed the whole experience in a way that made it appeal to his sense of self-importance. In reality he had had the worst scare of his life. Driven out of his wits with fright, he had vowed to devote his life to his child, if his own were saved.

In retracing Allmers' past, to explain that vow, we stumble on a deep-seated "complex." For nine years remorse had been gnawing at his heart, for the crippling of his child; but he had repressed it so effectively that it turned under ground, to continue its corrosive work in his subconscious self. But though the root of the disease was well concealed, symptoms began to show in an increasing restlessness which culminated in his decision to brace himself by a trip to the mountains. And we come upon a second complex—antedating the first—centering on Rita. Conscious of the fact that he had not married Rita for her own sake, but for her money, there had been, in all the passion which her beauty and the habits of married life kindled in him, an undercurrent of resentment, an undefined aversion, which crystallized into a solid nucleus when the child sustained its injury as a consequence of Rita's passion, or at least of the passion which she had kindled. This complex also grew underground. Then, not to be forgotten, the third complex, concerning his work. He worried and fretted, seeking for external reasons to which to ascribe his inability to make any headway, obstinately shutting his eyes in the face of the fact that he hadn't the mental stuff in him out of which thinkers are made.

Then he went to the mountains. Contrary to his expectation that he would find himself inspired to write in the midst of the great solitude, the inert, viscous mass did not melt, his thoughts would not flow. And from day to day, from week to week he chafed and fretted, working himself up, finally, into a mad frenzy. So that he tore across the hills, blindly, seeking to deaden the rush of his maddened blood. Until he suddenly found himself lost, one day, in the wilds. Then abject terror seized upon him, as he worked his way through the forest, climbing frantically at first, then,

maddened by hunger, as the sun set and rose again, dragging himself along, on the verge of exhaustion. At last, when the hysteria of fright made it appear to him as though death were bodily walking by his side, a gruesome fellow-traveler, the stays of his mind gave way, the unremitted pressure of nine years relaxed and the feeling of guilt with regard to his child worked its way to the surface of his consciousness. Then, *appealing to the God in whom he professed not to believe,* he made the vow, if his life were spared, to devote himself exclusively to his child. Perhaps the hope that his vow might be heard, gave him new strength, where otherwise he would have succumbed. At any rate, he found his way back to civilization. There, with the incubus of fright removed, his experience, containing as it did elements of which he must needs be ashamed, was quickly retouched in such a way as to give it the color of a sublime spiritual victory: He had been purged of all earthly dross; he felt like a saint, having triumphed over death. The knowledge of having prayed to God was, of course, promptly suppressed; his conviction of guilt, with regard to little Eyolf, dived down again into the subconscious stratum of his self; but the resolution to devote himself henceforth exclusively to the boy was retained as a symbol of his triumph over self; for it hushed up that inner voice that had been trying to persuade him of his failure as a thinker. And finally, his saintliness, removed from all selfhood, gave him a lever for punishing Rita by making her perforce join in his abstinence from the pleasures of the senses. He returned home, looking as if transfigured, all eager to put his new outlook on life into practice. And the next day saw all his high hopes collapse utterly, like a pricked balloon.

I make no pretense of "proving" this interpretation of

Allmers' self-revelation. However, if my analysis of his character up to that point has been correct, I think it will be accepted as plausible, on the whole, even though a keener analyst would probably succeed in unraveling the multiple strands of his complexes with greater nicety.

Allmers' revelation has thoroughly alarmed Rita, for though she feels that his account is colored, yet it renews her fear that he may leave her. "Oh, sooner or later you will go away from me, Alfred!" she exclaims. "I feel it! I can see it in your face! You will go away from me.—*Allmers.* With my fellow-traveler, do you mean?—*Rita.* No, I mean worse than that. Of your own free will you will leave me—for you think it's only here, with me, that you have nothing to live for. Is not that what is in your thoughts?" And Allmers replies, "(Looking steadfastly at her.) What if it were—?" (142), showing his cruel delight in keeping her in a suspense more dreadful than certainty.

They are interrupted by the wrangling sound of brutal voices down at the shore—drunken sailors abusing their miserable families. "Should we not get some one to go down and help them?" Rita asks, in response to the voice of pity stirring in her.—"*Allmers.* (Harshly and angrily.) Help them, who did not help Eyolf! Let them go—as they let Eyolf go" (143). The pettiness of his spite as contrasted with Rita's warm human sympathy requires no comment.

The incident has provided Allmers with a new topic upon which his mind forthwith proceeds to work. "All the old hovels ought to be torn down," he continues; and as Rita would make him believe that he is forcing himself to this harshness, he bursts forth in vehement self-defense: "I have a right to be harsh now. It is my duty.—My duty to

Eyolf. He must not lie unavenged. Once for all, Rita—it is as I tell you! Think it over! Have the whole place down there razed to the ground—when I am gone" (144).

The ridiculousness of his thundering like a genie in a bottle must not make us overlook the *nuance* of megalomania in this theatrical gesture. He bequeaths to Rita this work of destruction—when he is gone. Ancient tyrants were wont to slaughter their slaves on the funeral pyre of their beloved, but they did not defer the bloody sacrifice until they themselves had departed from life. Allmers' reaction is that of the savage. He revels in images of wholesale destruction to avenge, not so much Eyolf's, as his own passing!

But Rita has now decided to steer her own course. Firmly and decisively she declares, despite his ejaculations of dismay, that she is determined to take all those poor, neglected strand children to herself, to fill the gap left by Eyolf's death—"with something that is a little like love" (146).[19]

At last Rita has emancipated herself from Allmers' tutelage. She has conceived a constructive idea, on which she can build her life, wholly independent of his guidance. He feels that she is no longer dependent on him in the old way, that a change has indeed taken place in her. Accordingly, fearful of losing his hold on her altogether, he accedes to her proposal, after having gone through the fitting motion of standing for a moment lost in thought (146). He finds

[19] William Archer, who tells us in his introduction to the Play that Alfred Allmers had returned from the mountains "filled with a profound and remorseful pity for the lot of poor maimed humanity," says with regard to Rita's resolution to devote her life to the poor children: "The consuming fire of passion is now quenched, but it has left an empty space within them, and *they* feel a *common* need to fill it up with something that is a little like love. *They* come to remember that there are other children in the world on whom reckless instinct has thrust the gift of life—neglected children, stunted and maimed in mind if not in body." xiv.—The italics are mine.

it convenient to admit that the poor children were perhaps not so much to blame, after all, for not risking their lives to save little Eyolf. "Think, Alfred," Rita softly continues his reflections, "are you so certain that—that we would have risked ours?" Even Rita, kind generous soul, must have smiled inwardly at his answer "(With an uneasy gesture of repulsion.) You must never doubt *that*" (147).

Once more Allmers makes the attempt to regain the lead. He hopes to score a moral victory by discerning the motives actuating Rita in her decision, and by belittling them. "Be quite clear about one thing, Rita," he says, "(Looking steadfastly at her.)—it is not love that is driving you to do this." Again her candor, utterly devoid of any moral pathos, completedly parries his attack. "No, it is not —at any rate, not yet," she replies (148). As he insists on knowing what it is, she half-evasively tries to say something about human responsibility; but she does not get far with it, for any abstract thinking is foreign to her nature which finds meaning and can convey meaning only in images.[20] Moreover, Allmers now seems to know the term Human Responsibility only as the title of his unwritten volume, for when she attempts to speak of responsibility, he proceeds to speak at once of his book (148-9). So Rita gives up the attempt to talk his language; she speaks as her natural feeling dictates: "Jeg vil smigre mig ind hos de store, aabne øjnene, ser du,"[21]—a phrase for which words fail us in English. "I want to flatter my way into the good graces of those great, open eyes," preserves the charming image of the original while sacrificing its colloquial brevity. Archer's "I want to make my peace with the great, open

[20] The steamer's green and red lights are eyes to her; the ship's bells torture her with their song; Krykken flyder, krykken flyder—the crutch is floating. (131-4.)

[21] S. V. IX, 310.

eyes," is English, but the sensuous Rita would never have said it.

Rita's simple candor silences Allmers' criticism. Apparently overcome by a wave of genuine emotion, he volunteers to help her in her task. And his enthusiasm—volatile though we know it to be—waxes momentarily, and it carries him aloft, so that his voice throbs once more with the ring of the sage gazing from transcendental heights upon human life below. "—*Allmers.* (Coming forward again.) We have a heavy day of work before us, Rita.—*Rita.* You will see—that now and then a Sabbath peace will descend on us. —*Allmers.* (Quietly, with emotion.) Then, perhaps, we shall know that the spirits are with us.—*Rita.* (Whispering.) The spirits?—*Allmers.* (As before.) Yes, they will perhaps be around us—those whom we have lost.—*Rita.* (Nods slowly.) Our little Eyolf. And your big Eyolf, too.—*Allmers.* (Gazing straight before him.) Now and then, perhaps, we may still—on the way through life—have a little, passing glimpse of them.—*Rita.* Where shall we look for them, Alfred?—*Allmers.* (Fixing his eyes upon her.) Upwards.—*Rita.* (Nods in approval.) Yes, yes—upwards. —*Allmers.* Upwards—towards the peaks. Toward the stars. And towards the great silence.—*Rita.* (Giving him her hand.) Thanks!" (150-51).

As I copy these, the concluding words of the play, I am impressed with their sound. They are like the rhythmic strains of a great, far-off organ, proclaiming the peace that passeth all understanding. The last note is one of complete harmony. That impression lasts so long as one dissociates the words from Allmers, who utters them. But coming as they do from Allmers, the poseur, the self-deluded charlatan, who to the end has not changed his nature any more than the leopard his proverbial spots—what can they be but in-

cense offered on the altar of his worship of self! Like Stensgaard ("League of Youth"), like Hjalmar Ekdal, Allmers displays real talent for oratory, because his facile enthusiasm makes it easy for him to speak with the fervor of conviction—just like the modern salesman, who "sells" himself an idea before selling it to his customer!

Rita is moved and thankful. Life will be supportable with a task and with him to help her in it. She is grateful to him for not leaving her to do it alone, for she loves him still, despite the bitter scenes of the last two days and her partial detection of his insincerity. Whether she will be grateful for his presence much longer,—that, however, is a matter not so easy to decide. When the first fine enthusiasm of Allmers has spent itself, will he then be a drag on her zeal? Perhaps, but perhaps we should trust this adept at the art of self-delusion—another member of the family of Gynt—always to take the wise course of finding a means to make the facts—somehow or other—tally with his wishes. Who knows, Allmers may be feasted before his death as a great philanthropist. He may rise to answer the toast in his honor and roll out smooth phrases about atonement and human responsibility. And he may say: "When I stopped writing the great thick book on Human Responsibility I did so because I felt I was abusing—or rather, wasting my time, for I knew there were one or two other things which I was fitted —or rather, destined to do."

Our analysis of the characters has led us to conclusions that contrast sharply with the "orthodox" interpretation of "Little Eyolf." The presumptive protagonist or bearer of Ibsen's message has been exposed as a sorry wretch, part crank and part fraud; his harping on responsibility and morality has only served to discredit him the more com-

pletely. Rita, on the other hand, the frankly non-moral creature of sense, who even in her last fine resolve gives her action a purely personal, non-moral formulation, has been shown as going through a change which wins for her not only our sympathy but our admiration as well. Searing sorrow, agony over the wish that could not be recalled, has been the agent which, in releasing her from the clutch-hold of jealous egotism, has allowed her natural sympathies to expand freely. Rita worked her way out of her selfish narrowness, because her nature was generous and sound at bottom. She achieved expansion in sympathy not because of, but in spite of the moralist's preaching. Seen from this angle, the play presents a triumph of nature over morality, rather than the reverse.

The situation of the play offers a fine basis for generalization. Man, being encased in the strait-jacket of ideology, never able to get away, in his judgment of conduct, from general standards, is at a disadvantage over against woman, who dispenses with abstract reasoning, with ideology, content to base her conduct on the bidding of specific impulses without the thought of general standards. Reason, seen as conscience in its application to moral facts, works nothing but mischief, because it forces man, who in the last resort acts on impulse himself, to waste his strength in building up elaborately complex fictions for the purpose of deceiving himself as to his motives. I have my doubts as to what extent Ibsen meant to convey any such general implications by the specific situation. However, if one looks for a message capable of logical formulation, it is to be found here rather than in ascetic renunciation of life, as generally supposed.

There remains to be answered the question: How could this play have been so radically misinterpreted?

For one thing we found there was a great deal in Allmers' utterances and his actions that was susceptible of an equivocal interpretation. From the outset we presumed that he was meant to engage our sympathies. He seemed a serious, sincere thinker, striving for the light, despite his human weaknesses. The love of two women is centered on him. The one, gentle and sensitive in all her utterances, would tempt us to share her love for Allmers; the other, passionate and jealous, is clearly put, even technically, in a position of disadvantage over against him. Furthermore, we have his self-revelation near the close of the final act, and self-revelations occurring at such a point are apt to be taken at their face value.

What complicates matters more is the fact that in numerous instances Ibsen seemed to have chosen Allmers for the mouthpiece of his own ideas and feelings. We felt that from the outset, where Allmers' remark about thinking being so much better than what is put on paper, seemed clearly to echo Ibsen's own feeling. It was to be felt again and again in the course of the Play, although I refrained from pointing it out, for the obvious purpose of not complicating the delicate task of analysis still further. But we may pause to recall here the most noteworthy instances of the author's seeming to peer over the shoulder of his central character. Ibsen himself felt frequently enough that he was frittering away his time in the mere writing about human responsibility. Allmers shares his longing for the great stillness with the ageing dramatist. Allmers' morbid doubting of his powers suggests Ibsen's own doubt of his mission,—a doubt which forms one of the leitmotifs of many of his dramas.—Like Allmers Ibsen felt himself but a forerunner. We know from "The Master-Builder" how his relation to the younger generation occupied Ibsen's attention; similarly Allmers hopes

that his boy will take up his father's life work and carry it to a successful conclusion. Allmers' definition of happiness, as harmony between desire and what is attainable, unmistakably voices an ever-recurring longing of Ibsen's own. The fascination of the gruesome, which Allmers speculates about, is one of the themes which Ibsen's own fancy lingered on; it is this same fascination which puts Ellida Wangel, the Lady from the Sea, under the spell of the Stranger and which makes little Eyolf succumb to the lure of the Rat-Wife. The note of ascetic renunciation voiced by Allmers (approaching at times even the language of Brand) has been taken to point to the deepening gloom of the poet's own outlook on life; and Rita's reproach to Allmers, for having destroyed her religious faith, has been interpreted as the voice of self-accusation on Ibsen's part. Allmers' gloomy remark, again, about meeting the right fellow-traveler too late, may well be the echo of a stifled outcry of Ibsen's own. Finally, the lofty note of reconciliation, on which the Play closes, sounds like an intensely personal yearning on the poet's part for peace from the world's strife and passion.

The careful student of Ibsen's works, who knows to what a remarkable degree all his plays are the fruit of self-analysis, is bound to attach the utmost importance to the many striking correspondences between the words of Allmers and the thoughts that filled Ibsen's years of silent brooding. At first thought he will think it monstrous to link up these correspondences with the supposition that Allmers should have been deliberately conceived by the author as a self-deluded charlatan. Fortunately, this dilemma can be completely resolved, thanks to the fact that the first draft of "Little Eyolf" has been preserved. As we study those first jottings, the flavor of personal confession is unmistaka-

bly perceived in phrase after phrase, thought after thought. The words of the Allmers originally projected, who, after having sent book after book into the world, sees himself fail in his masterpiece, because he discovers too late its irreparable defect (it did not take renunciation into account); [22] who takes himself to task for indulging in morbid, distorted, baseless fancies that he had some special mission in the world to perform,[23]—those words are, in fact, a moody lyrical monologue revealing the gloom in which Ibsen's soul was sunk despite his outward successes. But the philosopher of the first draft is not the Alfred Allmers of the finished play; in the initial scenes he does not even bear his name. Skioldhejm, as he is there called, has given undisputed proof of his ability as a thinker; he gives proof of his sincerity by frankly admitting that what was to be his masterpiece is a failure, and further proof of it in telling the two women, who have kept cares and troubles from him and surrounded him with comfort and abundance, that they flatter him and spoil him.[24] Moreover, it is evident that the fundamental outlines of the plot had not yet taken shape in Ibsen's mind when he penned his first scenes of the original draft. Skioldhejm's wife is not the jealous Rita, but a loyal believer in her husband's life work.[25]

So the first draft seems to show that, in this play, at any rate, neither the characters nor the dramatic situation supplied the initial impulse to Ibsen's creative imagination; but rather a number of ideas (or well-defined feelings) that formed the solid nucleus of moods of brooding self-analysis; not ideas selected in consequence of his casting about for

[22] F.I.W., 479.
[23] *Ibid.*, 482.
[24] *Ibid.*, 479.
[25] *Ibid.*, 473.

something dramatically effective, but ideas bathed in the sweat of personal anguish—obsessions, perhaps, rather than ideas.

As these ideas, feelings, yearnings, began to detach themselves from Ibsen's mind, they became enveloped by the at first shadowy outline of a human figure. He seemed mild and grave, a thinker, with a touch of resignation about his mouth; and around him a number of other shapes began to be dimly discerned,—two women and a boy; finally what seemed like another man, even less distinctly, somewhat apart from the rest. Then this must have happened:

Ibsen began to observe with his mind's eye those human shapes that moved in space before him. In the center of the shifting group stood the mild-eyed man with the thinker's brow and the sad expression. Ibsen looked upon him with pleasure, watching his movements and listening to his words with rapt attention. Then something must have occurred that displeased the observer,—a gesture or a word on the part of the mild-eyed man with ever so little of a trace of exaggeration. A momentary frown passed over the dramatist's face; then, gradually, his gaze became stony, impassive. He had become critical. Suspicion took the place of naïve observation. He began to watch the mild-eyed man like a detective who has a suspect under observation. And gradually, as he watched and listened, straining every nerve to penetrate beyond the cover of the man's conscious self, his suspicions became confirmed: There was a sub-stratum of insincerity underneath this fine-looking, high-minded exterior! And now he began to listen in earnest. With a diabolical intensity of attention he analyzed the man's behavior, discovering bit after bit of incriminating evidence in the subtlest shadings of intonation. He saw through the man, through all the fine words with which he

deceived himself and those who loved him as to his complete hollowness.

Now, what was he to do with his evidence? Expose the man, put him in the pillory for others to jeer and scoff at? No, he reasoned, those others were too much like him to deserve this amusement. So, with an almost satanic smile of satisfaction, he decided to keep to himself his esoteric knowledge of the man's real nature. He wrote his play, concealing with an uncanny deftness the multiple strands of the man's self-delusion, making them almost too involved to unravel. He let stand all those high-sounding words, those moody words of self-reproach and yearning; those aphoristic bits of wisdom; even to that great finale of peace descending, hushing the strife and turmoil of passion. He let them stand, those words that had originally risen to the surface of his own brooding soul as expressions of his own outcries against the bitterness of life and of his own yearning for the great stillness. He let them stand in the mouth of Allmers, the moral crank, the self-deluded fraud, anticipating with a mocking smile how the reader would derive edification from them.

That is what happened. And the great artist, the embittered moralist-cynic, having carved his portrait-bust, in which every one praised the striking likeness and nobody saw the secret mark of the beast underneath, laughed a dry laugh of diabolical gratification. "I alone can see it. And it amuses me unspeakably."

## XI

## JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN

"John Gabriel Borkman," the last but one of Ibsen's dramas, appeared two years after "Little Eyolf." The alignment of the principal characters bears a striking resemblance to that of "Pillars of Society." In both plays the central figure is an unscrupulous financier who has renounced the woman he loved and married her sister, for the sake of making a career. In treatment, however, no two plays could be more unlike. While the former is a defiant trumpet-blast, calling society to account, the latter is a solemn dirge over three blighted individual existences—a dead man and two shadows. Organized society has ceased to interest the author of "John Gabriel Borkman."

Compared to its immediate forerunner, this is not a difficult play. Whereas nothing but an analysis of the most searching kind enabled us to penetrate beneath the protective layers of his moral cant to the kernel of Alfred Allmers' personality, Borkman's delusion is too colossal and too unguarded to require a like degree of caution in taking his measure. As for the two aged sisters, who share the foreground with Borkman, they are worth the closest psychological study; yet our interest in the subtleties of their fencing is overshadowed by the dynamic force of will which they both enlist in the cause of their mutual hate.

Technically, this drama has a striking novel feature. The action continues throughout the four acts without a pause.

First we see the twin sisters' dramatic struggle for supremacy taking place in Mrs. Borkman's room. Toward the end of the act we hear the strains of the "danse macabre" which Frida Foldal is playing to Borkman in the big hall above. In the second act we are taken upstairs to hear Borkman addressing himself to Frida, who has just finished playing. After the climax of the second act, brought on by Mrs. Borkman's sudden appearance and equally sudden departure, we accompany Borkman and Ella down again to witness, in the third act, Ella's effort to bring about a reconciliation between husband and wife. At the close of the act, Borkman rushes out, followed by Ella and also by Gunhild, who wishes to intercept the flight of her son. There, in the doorway, we find them, in the last act; and with Ella we accompany Borkman on his last walk. Thus, with respect to the unity of time, the technical naturalism of Ibsen reaches in "Borkman" its climax. The cycle of the action runs its course in less than three hours. While most of Ibsen's plays are said to represent only the last act of the dramatic conflict, by virtue of their retrospective technique, we get in "Borkman" the "last act" in one continuous scene.

Such a technical feat as this called for a dramatic mechanism of the most skillful construction. Figuratively speaking, it required the planting of a number of time fuses, calculated to detonate at brief intervals and accelerate the progress of the action by a rapid succession of psychological shocks. Thus we find three events of the utmost moment in precipitating the tragedy to be synchronously timed: the arrival of Ella Rentheim, the fateful visit of Foldal, and the elopement of Erhard with Fanny Wilton. That these should all happen to occur in the course of the same evening is, of course, a matter of chance, but there is nothing extraordi-

nary about such a coincidence and nothing to infringe on the plausibility of the action in the slightest degree.[1]

At the same time, however, the drama of "Borkman" represents in another respect, a deliberate departure from Ibsen's basic naturalism. There is an austere grandeur about those three lonely existences, suggesting in repose the colossal lines of hieratic statuary, and in movement the over-life-size figures of the ancient classical stage. On the technical side this has led to a distinctly perceptible formality in the composition. It is to be noticed in the first act, where the twin sisters stand matched against each other and each measures the other with silent hostility. In rhythmical sequence they exchange a number of passes, each cautiously, almost coolly bent on feeling out the weakness of her opponent. Now one scores a point, now the other. As they warm up to the contest, they begin to lunge out more recklessly; thrust follows thrust in quick succession, until finally, when their mutual hate has been fanned to white heat and the tension is at its highest, the decision is postponed, as both agree to make Erhard the arbiter of their fates. We feel this formality of composition in the dynamic ascent of the second act. The dialogue between Borkman and Frida is pure exposition, until Frida's chatter about the party at the Hinkels, to which Erhard has been invited, arouses Borkman's resentment. When old Foldal appears, a growing irritation is to be perceived in Borkman's voice, resulting in an exchange of words which causes Borkman's most cherished illusion to go by the boards. Now Ella Rentheim comes and stirs him to his depths, as she makes the whole past rise up accusingly before him. Lastly Gunhild, emerging like a spectral apparition and departing just as suddenly,

[1] For a set of coincidences marking a structural weakness, on the other hand, cf. "The Lady from the Sea."

makes the act end with an overwhelming climax. In Act III the formality of composition is carried to an extreme in the grouping of the characters. The three old people, each living in a world apart from the rest, each bent on an end that excludes the success of the others, nevertheless form a compact group aligned against Erhard and Fanny Wilton, representatives of the younger generation. We behold the two camps of young and old, pitted against one another. Distance, we feel, could make the antagonisms of the three old people blend into harmony, but it will never bridge the gulf between the two generations. And again, in Act IV, the formality is emphasized by the final group—the two women clasping hands over the corpse of Borkman—and by the solemn rhythm of their final words which sound like measured responses, chanted rather than spoken.

*Ella Rentheim.* (With a painful smile.) A dead man and two shadows—that is what the cold has made of us.

*Mrs. Borkman.* Yes, the coldness of heart. And now I think we two may hold out our hands to each other, Ella.

*Ella Rentheim.* I think we may, now.

*Mrs. Borkman.* We twin sisters—over him we have both loved.

*Ella Rentheim.* We two shadows—over the dead man.

Two lines of action, distinct for all the closeness with which they are intertwined, run through the Play. The first, the conflict between mother and foster-mother for the exclusive possession of the boy, is dramatic to the core. This action is practically complete when the curtain falls on Act III. The second is the passing of Borkman. The latter has more of the qualities of a solemn spectacle than of a dramatic struggle. Like a wrecked man-o'-war that runs up its colors before taking the final plunge, Borkman rises to his full stature as he goes to his doom. Incapable of a deed, he passes with a magnificent gesture.

The self-delusion of Allmers earned him our contempt; that of Borkman elicits compassion and awe. Had his self-delusion been less colossal, had his helplessness and his isolation been less complete, we would turn against him with quick resentment. But we do not care to prod the dying wolf with our jibes. Nor should we wish to see him borrow the fleece of the lamb.

Borkman owes the elements of greatness that accompany his passing largely to the height of his fall. It would be a mistake to picture him as a genius of finance and industry brought to the ground by a malicious trick of fortune,—a Napoleon crippled in his first battle, as he would have us believe. He did not embark on his gigantic speculations with the consciousness of being a superman, and therefore beyond the pale of good and evil. True, he dreamed of creating fabulous wealth, he let his imagination run riot in picturing how he would exploit the resources of nature on an unheard-of scale. But what he did, when he wasn't dreaming, was to squander wealth with frenzied recklessness, to intoxicate himself with a fictitious sense of power, content to take the appearance of the thing for the thing itself. Even Ella, so obviously partial to Borkman in her hostility to Gunhild, can find only a halting defense for his reckless spending: "I daresay his position forced him to do that—to some extent at any rate." Borkman insisted on his family living in an absurdly lavish style. He encouraged Gunhild to squander money, and he squandered it ten times more than she did. It has been suggested, quite correctly I think, that there was a certain sly intent in Ibsen's giving Borkman that un-Norwegian first name, John. In sketching John Gabriel, as he appeared in the days of his glory—driving his coach-and-four, as if he were a king; letting the populace bow and scrape, as before the king; hearing

himself hailed by his first name—John Gabriel—exactly like the king—should Ibsen's thought not have harked back to Jon Gynt, that great fourflusher, the father of Peer?

The fate of Borkman was typical of the frenzied spender. When he felt that his reckless living had carried him beyond his depth, he tried to save himself by a gigantic swindle. He floated new stock issues running into fantastic figures, and to tide himself over he tampered with the trust funds of the bank, in the spirit of a gambler. Can we accept his unsupported word for it, sixteen years after the crash, that only the treachery of an associate was responsible for his downfall? That given another week's time he would have been able to straighten out his affairs so that not a creditor would have lost a penny? There is nothing in his statement to distinguish it from the typical plea of a thousand other bankrupt speculators.

But the touchstone, showing that his clay was not of superman consistency, is provided by his conduct at the investigation. Did he tell the jury that common standards of honesty do not apply to the exceptional individual in exceptional circumstances? That the imperious call of his mission brooked no gainsaying? No, he resorted to the petty excuse of Adam. He blamed it on his wife, saying that it was her spending which began his ruin.

After the crash came three interminable years of preliminary detention, followed by five years in the penitentiary, and these again were succeeded by eight more years of voluntary unbroken confinement in the great hall of the Rentheim mansion with its faded rococo mural paintings. From time to time he would go to the stairway and start to reach for his coat. But each time, after pausing in indecision, he would turn back, and the muffled sound of his

steps would reëcho in the rooms of his wife below, like the pacing of a captive wolf.

Sixteen years of almost unbroken confinement. . . . Another man would either have crumpled under the combined humiliation and physical torture, visibly wrecked beyond repair; or toughening himself against the thousand pinpricks of social contempt, he would have started out afresh, after his release, to rebuild his fortune. Borkman does neither. He pursues a course of his own, indicating that there was, after all, something extraordinary in his make-up, differentiating him from the common crew of wrecked fortune-hunters. Since outward life has ceased for Borkman, since existence has become static, repeating cycle after cycle without perceptible change, his imagination, overdeveloped and restlessly active from the first, expands unchecked, never meeting with a corrective rebuff from reality. As Borkman's imagination travels over the same ground a thousand times and a thousand times again, rehearsing his dreams and his ambition and the catastrophe, it transforms the facts, bit by bit, obliterating here and retouching there, until he stands fully cleared from blame in his own sight. His conduct appears without a flaw from beginning to end: He, the exceptional individual, whose divination outdistanced the eyes of the ordinary man, could not have let himself be bound by considerations which regulate the life of the common herd. He has acted under the iron law of necessity, and under similar conditions he would be bound to act in precisely the same way again. His was the tragedy of the select individual who has to pay the price for his superiority by being barred from sympathetic contact with those beneath him. And his aims had been essentially unselfish. He had dreamed of being a benefactor to humanity, of increasing the possibilities of material happiness a

thousandfold, by harnessing the forces of nature and making the whole delicate machinery interlock as one gigantic mechanism, to be controlled by his superbrain.

Having rehearsed this train of thought to himself year after year, he assumes his most confident pose in the great scene of the meeting between husband and wife, as he sets out to persuade Gunhild of the faultlessness of his conduct. But he has been so used to thinking in monologues that his plea for acquittal is inadvertently challenged by his own version of what has happened.

"It is true that nothing new happens," he says in commenting on his act; "but what *has* happened does not repeat itself either. It is the eye that transforms the action. The eye, born anew, transforms the old action." There he checks himself, as he becomes aware of the drift of his remarks. "But you do not understand this," he says, turning to Gunhild. To us, however, these words reveal in a flash the unsubstantial texture of his defense. He could not have spoken them, had there not lingered in his consciousness an echo of the fact that the motives on which he now bases his case were conceived *subsequent* to the act which they are intended to justify. In a semiconscious way, at least, he realizes that his eye, born anew during the long years of his confinement, has fundamentally transformed, i.e., reinterpreted the original character of his deed. That in spite of this he can regard his "ex post facto" motivation as justifying his verdict of self-acquittal, shows to what a supreme disdain of material fact he has become habituated in his isolation.

How significant to note that when cornered, Borkman admits, in an overhasty move of defense, that there was nothing in his act to distinguish it from what any one else in his place would have done, save the superiority of his motives,

—something, in the nature of things, undemonstrable. "If the others had had the power," he asks, turning upon Gunhild, "do you think they would not have acted exactly as I did?" "No one, no one but you would have done it!" is Gunhild's rejoinder, to which he replies: "Perhaps not. But that would have been because they had not my brains. And if they had done it, it would not have been with my aims in view. The act would have been a different act." Is not this defense of Borkman's a telling self-accusation? How ill it becomes the self-styled superman to shield himself behind the plea that the others would have done likewise! It brings back to mind the scene of the court-room, where he tried to shift the blame for his default onto his wife. The real superman, taking the words out of Mrs. Borkman's mouth, would have said without a quaver: "No one but me would have done it." For proof of his superiority he would have pointed to his act, not to his motive.

However, in this scene we have found him somewhat off his guard. He was not used to being questioned by others. He was used to going over the case in his own mind, impersonating the prosecutor, the defendant and the judge in his own person, and always pronouncing the verdict of his own acquittal. He had even gone further. He had rehearsed the tale of his intellectual superiority so long, until he had come to the conclusion that the world of pygmies could not, in the long run, get along without him. They would come, in the end, a humble deputation, begging him to assume on his own terms the directorship of the bank, now that they had found it too difficult for themselves to manage. Day after day he waits for that deputation, hoping that his hour has struck.

We see him, dressed in his immaculate black of slightly old-fashioned cut, as he stands by his writing table, holding

a hand-glass and adjusting his white necktie. There is a knock at the door. He does not answer at first, he bides his time. The knock is repeated, and now, resting his left hand on the table and thrusting his right hand into the breast of his coat, he answers: "Come in." But instead of the deputation of citizens, which he had been ready to receive with fitting dignity, there enters the shrunken, pathetic figure of one, formerly his clerk, now his only remaining friend. Once more fate has been toying with him. To see the colossal gap between the world of his dreams and the world of fact, stirs one to pity. As we witness that scene between the two friends,—Borkman still smarting under the irritation left by Frida's words about the party; disappointed in seeing his hopes deferred once again; haughtily condescending in his manner to old Foldal; as we see the secret of their odd friendship exposed in the fostering of each other's illusions, and as we see it crumble when Borkman in a fit of temper breaks the cobweb tissue of the fiction of their mutual equality,—our feelings are those of infinite compassion. Mirth or sarcasm at this juncture would jar on us like the desecration of a tomb. And when Ella Rentheim enters, like a ghost from by-gone days, and her questions bring to light an even more shocking sub-stratum of his egotism—his cold-blooded attempt to barter away the woman he loved—even then resentment against the man, born of sympathy for the woman, is tempered by compassion for the man's awful isolation. We see him encased in his egotism as in a shell of steel; we feel the tragic futility of all attempts on the part of another human being to find the way to his heart. Ella Rentheim, wronged by Borkman, yet unable to forget her fondness for him, would need only the faintest sign of encouragement to forgive him in full; instead, she finds him turn on her with the accusation that by

having refused to play the part assigned her in his iniquitous deal, *she* was to blame for the wreck of his life.

For the same reason Ella's attempt to bring husband and wife together is foredoomed to failure. Both are hard as flint. To make them fuse is a hopeless task. Gunhild is bitter in her accusation, and Borkman answers with a grandiose flourish of self-acquittal.

The events of the evening carry Borkman to a catastrophe. For the first time in eight years the static cycle of his existence has been broken by a series of vivid experiences. The dream that he was indispensable to the world, that he need only bide his time until he were called, has been shattered. In the coming of Ella Rentheim, in the appearance of his wife, in the tense meeting of father and son as strangers, reality has delivered a headlong surprise attack on the ivory tower of his isolation. The equilibrium of his static existence once shaken, it cannot be restored. Once more Borkman is caught up in the current of life and carried along, but only for a moment. His limbs have become fixed in their statuesque pose; it is too late to adapt them to the shifting medium. His form shapes itself into a final gesture, expressing the quintessence of his singular personality,—then it is sucked under by the swirling waters that rush on without abatement.

Borkman takes advantage of the confusion resulting from Erhard's departure to force his way out into the open. Now for the first time a note of terror blends with his bravado. A nucleus of insanity, confined for years to a small area by the effective barrier of his life-sustaining illusion, expands now that this check is removed, in the space of minutes, into an obsession which pervades his whole being. Once he is out of the house, no power on earth shall induce him to set foot inside those four walls again. With his mind rapidly

veering toward delirium, he sees the mansion frowning upon him as a prison from which he, the convict, has just made his escape. They shall not trick him into entering the cage a second time, he calculates. In order to take no chances, he descends the stone steps that lead up to the great portal and makes for the open with hasty strides.

Borkman has rushed out into the night, with Ella following. As if drawn by a magnetic power, he staggers upward, over the rugged hills, until he finds himself on the plateau that gives a wide sweep of view over the countryside to the interminable mountain chains in the distance. His eye dilates hungrily as it sweeps the range of what he calls his vast, his infinite, inexhaustible kingdom.

*Ella Rentheim.* Oh, but there comes an icy blast from that kingdom, John!

*Borkman.* That blast is the breath of life to me. That blast comes to me like a greeting from subject spirits. I seem to touch them, the prisoned millions; I can see the veins of metal stretch out their winding, branching, luring arms to me. I saw them before my eyes like living shapes, that night when I stood in the vault with the candle in my hand. You begged to be liberated, and I tried to free you. But my strength failed me; and the treasure sank back into the deep again. (With outstretched hands.) But I will whisper it to you here in the stillness of the night: I love you, as you lie there spellbound in the deeps and the darkness! I love you, unborn treasures, yearning for the light! I love you, love you, love you!"

There is something enthralling in the passionate sweep of Borkman's delirious yearnings. The vast silence of the landscape, steeped in an eerie light, makes for his passing a setting of majestic grandeur. In the creation of no male character since the time of Peer Gynt has Ibsen given such free rein to the poet.

As tragic as the fate of Borkman is that of his wife. Gunhild's life also has been anchored to an illusion. It is torn from its moorings and cast adrift, when Erhard fails her. Gunhild does not, at first, draw out our sympathy. She repels us by her icy coldness; and even her austere morality we feel, even in advance of logical analysis, as a sort of grim fetishism. Gunhild is a reincarnation of the Hjördis of "The Vikings," just as her gentler sister likens Dagny. But if Gunhild resembles Hjördis in the steely hardness of her hatred, we perceive not a trace, at first, of any corresponding capacity for love. Like Hjördis Gunhild is rigidly bound by the authority of ancestral tradition. The exclusive social unit in terms of which she thinks is the family. Not as individuals, but as members of a family indissolubly grown together, she regards herself as well as Erhard and Borkman. Those beyond the pale of her family are strangers. They do not count beside the welfare of her own family unit. In asking Borkman's consent to let Erhard continue the name of Rentheim after her death, her sister uses an argument that conforms altogether to Gunhild's own way of thinking. "There is more binding force in a name than you think or believe, Borkman," says Ella. The binding force of a name—is it not that, in the last resort, which gives to Gunhild's life its direction after Borkman's fall?

Can one call it love, this devotion of Gunhild's to the impersonal concept of the family? It is devoid of endearing warmth; it enslaves the individual; but we feel behind it the same heroic tenacity as built the pyramids and erected the great cathedrals. Although our feelings side with Ella, when she tells Gunhild, "I wanted to smooth the way for Erhard to happiness in life," we cannot refuse Gunhild a certain admiration for her rejoinder: "Pooh—people situ-

ated as we are have something else than happiness to think of."

Our admiration for Gunhild waxes and even warms to sympathy, as she opens the door and interrupts the dialogue between Borkman and Ella, just at the moment when the latter has secured his promise that Erhard shall renounce his father's name. "I will fight with all my might for you," she exclaims, facing her husband. "I will protect you from the powers of evil. But this I tell you—he shall bear his father's name! And bear it aloft in honor again. And I will be his mother! I alone! My son's heart shall be mine—mine, and no other's."

And in the great scene of the third act, where Borkman opens all the sluices of his eloquence to refloat the stranded ship of his life and Gunhild cuts him off with killing sarcasm, there are discernible the overtones of an almost personal tenderness in Gunhild, as she tells him about the monument that she will erect to his memory. "There shall be, as it were, a quickset hedge of trees and bushes, close, close around your tomb. They shall hide away all the darkness that has been. The eyes of men and the thoughts of men shall no longer dwell on John Gabriel Borkman!" She has trained her son to build this monument, she continues. "His life shall be so pure and bright, that your burrowing in the dark shall be as though it had never been." Her hatred is not implacable; tranquil oblivion will replace hostility, after Erhard has made amends.

I am tempted to go even further; to say, in fact, that in her heart of hearts Gunhild felt something akin to love for Borkman the individual. If she did, she had to hate him all the more savagely, of course, for having choked up the outlet of her feelings, first by his indifference to her personally; then by besmirching the family name; again by

attempting to fasten his blame upon her; and finally by his refusal to make the first move toward a reconciliation. There are little signs from which I would gather that she felt more for Borkman than she was willing to avow to herself. Thus she flies into a temper in recalling how all of Borkman's old friends have deserted him. Such behavior on the part of those who had lost nothing, after all, but money, strikes her as miserable, low and petty. One of the most telling of these signs has to do with Frida Foldal. According to Gunhild, Erhard has made ample amends to Foldal for his paltry loss by taking an interest in his daughter. He had arranged to have her study music; he had been her own teacher; and—it turns out—he had contrived to have her come occasionally and play for his father. Now I confess myself as quite unable to believe that the initiative for any of these moves should have come from Erhard, whom we learn to know as the pleasure-loving young man, asserting almost hysterically his right to the pursuit of his own happiness. As for crediting him with any solicitude to ease the lot of his father—well, we see Erhard writhing with pain, as he hears the strains of the "danse macabre" on the floor above. From Borkman's remarks to Frida, to Foldal and to Ella Rentheim, moreover, we have every reason to infer that the father *never* saw his son, although it was too galling to his pride to admit the fact in so many bald words. No, it must have been Gunhild who first took an interest in little Frida, in order to pay a debt of gratitude to old Foldal for his fidelity. It must have been Gunhild who conceived the idea of having Frida's music occasionally while away a deadly hour to the old wolf above. Erhard was under her domination; it was easy for her to suggest to him a course of action and make him believe the thought to have been his own. Perhaps she came to be-

lieve it herself; more likely than not; it is possible, on the other hand, that only her sensitive pride kept her from avowing the truth to Ella, and this would not be the only instance of such deception. She also boasts to Ella that Erhard came to see her every evening. Had this been literally the case, it is not likely that Erhard should have risked arousing his mother's suspicions by talking vaguely about coming out again "to-morrow, perhaps," and about having a good long talk with aunt Ella "to-morrow or some other day."

Another instance which seems to show softer feelings just on the verge of breaking through the hard casing of her resentment, is found in the opening of the third act. Gunhild has ordered the maid to fetch Erhard. At that moment the door opens and Borkman appears with Ella in the doorway. Gunhild staggers backward. "Tell Erhard he must come this instant," she whispers to the maid. What makes her so eager to have Erhard present at this meeting? She feels for a moment, it seems to me, that at last the miracle is happening for which she had secretly been yearning year after year. To Ella she had confessed an hour ago, that her situation—always to hear his footsteps up there—was worse than terrible, almost unendurable. To Ella's question, "Is no change possible, Gunhild?" she had answered, with a gesture of repulsion, "He has never made any move towards a change." And when Ella had suggested, "Could you not make the first move, then?" she had exclaimed indignantly: "I! After all the wrong he has done me! No, thank you! Rather let the wolf go on prowling up there." But now it looked indeed as if he, the unbending man, were making the first move. Throbbing with secret hope, as I read her heart, but outwardly rigid, she draws herself up and waits for him to speak.

But Borkman's first words, haughty and self-contained as ever, banish that short-lived hope; and cheated once more out of the love she secretly craved, she cannot but answer his self-justification with bitter attacks. And yet it is her starved soul speaking, as she says: "You have never loved anything outside yourself; that is the secret of the whole matter."

Potential capacity of love there was in her, as hot and vehement as her hate was icy. So Gunhild's last words in the Drama, "We twin sisters—over him we have both loved," contain the admission of a truth that pride would never have allowed to pass her lips while he lived.

Which is the bitterer tragedy, that of Gunhild, or that of Ella? To be chosen unloved, or to be rejected despite love?

Like Gunhild, who sees the fiction of Erhard's lofty mission collapse at the first test, Ella finds that her own life, too, had been based on false assumptions—if not on consciously fostered illusions. For a quarter of a century she had found a certain solace in her hatred of Gunhild, who, as she fancied, had beguiled Borkman's fickle heart away from her by calculated trickery. Ella's love for Erhard had drawn its nourishment in equal portions from her defrauded mother instinct and from her desire to wean him away from his mother, as an act of revenge. We cannot close our eyes to the fact—any more than does Ella herself—that she wants the boy's affection even more than she desires his welfare. Unlike his mother, who rises above sentiment when what she regards as his highest welfare is at stake, Ella indulges her mother instinct, which is quickened, moreover, by the realization that her days are about numbered. She would be willing to spoil him for the sake of enjoying the warmth

of his spontaneous attachment, during the brief span left her. Hence, though we feel the urge of Ella's human need in her plea for the boy's heart, we cannot side with her against Erhard's mother. Our compassion is distributed in equal parts between the high-minded but tragically deluded Gunhild and the less heroic but warmer and equally unfortunate Ella.

Now Ella hears from Borkman's lips that she, too, had been chasing a phantom. No crafty trickery had turned Borkman's heart from her. She hears the monstrous truth of his cold-blooded deal. In any case her life has been wasted, but it enhances most poignantly her sense of its futility to realize on the last lap of her life's journey the tragic irony of her fate. The Dagny of "The Vikings" was mercifully spared the truth that Sigurd's love belonged to the other woman; this modern Dagny is not spared the bitterer truth that the man's love, such as he was capable of, had, after all, been hers.

Thus the tableau of "Borkman" makes us behold three tragic fates, each proceeding along distinct lines and all three nevertheless indissolubly intertwined. We see Borkman, Gunhild, and Ella, each set in sharp relief, and we see them as a sombre group—two shadows, clasping hands over a dead man.

The picture is supplemented by the contrast-figure of old Foldal. He stands somewhat closer to Borkman and Gunhild than to Ella, for like the former he had outwitted the insupportable bleakness of existence by building up an elaborate fiction. But he stands apart from them all, in so far as he manages to save his life-sustaining illusion in the general shipwreck. A kindly conceived tragi-comedy, relieving the gloom of the triple tragedy.

As we turn from the full-size portraits of the old people

to the members of the younger set, the latter strike us as mere sketches, in comparison, diminutive at that. Frida, Erhard and Fanny Wilton might almost be creatures of a different world, as for what they have in common with their elders. To a certain extent we sympathize with Erhard for wishing to escape the dull oppressiveness of his home. Why should his youth be further cut short by assisting in the death agonies of these three old people, who are strangers to him despite the ties of blood? A man in years, he is still a child in experience. His lungs have never learned to expand fully in the stuffy atmosphere at his aunt's and his mother's. Fresh air is what he needs; and if anything, the breezy unconventionality of Fanny Wilton's worldly wisdom will help to make a man of him. Still young enough to teach him the delights of passion, already old enough to mingle motherly solicitude with her ardor, and experienced enough in disillusionment not to build with too much assurance on the permanence of human relations, she will be companion and guide at the same time—until he is ready to emancipate himself. Yet about all three of them, from little Frida in her flimsy finery to the sophisticated divorcee, we feel a certain lightness and looseness of texture that sets them off against the older generation. These young people are not of the stuff out of which tragic fates are made. They lack the substance, the proportions, the intensity which are indispensable to greatness. They lack even the strength and solidity of fiber out of which great illusions are woven.

From "The Wild Duck" to "John Gabriel Borkman" Ibsen has traversed a long distance. The former play was explicit in its statement that, without an illusion to cling to, life is insupportable to the average run of man. The towering tragic figures of Ibsen's last dramas seem to point

to a modification of this philosophy. What raises Solness, Borkman and Gunhild to lonely heights, above the average run of man, is their ability to defy reality by building up the bulwark of a great illusion. For the aged skeptic greatness has come to define itself as the capacity for holding great illusions.

"John Gabriel Borkman" is the work of an old man. We perceive clearly that he sympathizes with the representatives of his own generation from within; he and they are fashioned from the same clay. But the younger generation he can only view from without. He tries to be fair to them, to see the justice of their passionate plea for the right to live and to enjoy the beckoning moment and of their revolt against the yoke of work and duty. But they seem to him light and frothy, inconsequential, even as compared to the great failures of his own generation.

These last reflections have led us to one of the phases of the subject which caused Ibsen's imagination to dwell upon the "Borkman" theme. The drama of "The Master-Builder" revealed to us how intensely Ibsen had become aware of the cleavage between old and young. In "Little Eyolf"—more particularly in the first draft—he had been engrossed with the conception that life progresses in a cycle of generations. In addition to the recurrence of this conflict of generations, there are, however, many other personal notes to be discerned, fully ranging this play in the series of his dramatic confessions. Borkman's notion that he is a chosen, exceptional individual and therefore a law unto himself; the physical compulsion under which he feels himself acting—the words and the gesture are identical with those of Solness, and they reveal his kinship with the long line of characters who feel themselves endowed with a personal mission. Now all those characters we have come to look

upon as emanations, primarily, of diverse phases of Ibsen's own self, and like the rest of them Borkman is unquestionably flesh of Ibsen's own flesh. From personal experience Ibsen knew the danger of self-intoxication in pacing back and forth interminably over the same spot. He knew the tragedy of the exceptional individual, doomed to mental isolation. The cynical words of Borkman about the essence of friendship being a tacit compact for mutual deception—they are written with the heart's blood of the man who renounced friendship because he found that friendship and intellectual integrity could not exist side by side.[2]

In "Borkman" Ibsen shows us three richly gifted people turning to stone, because the warmth of love is lacking. The poet's own life had never been fed by an abundant stream of love, and the older he grew, the nearer it came to drying up completely. Love is a matter of give and take, and Ibsen, though he hungrily craved love, was never able or willing to give himself to any one without reserve. Shortly after the completion of "Emperor and Galilean," on September 10, 1874, he dropped his customary reserve in a moment of emotion to tell a Norwegian student gathering how a piece of personal confession has gone into the make-up of Julian:

[2] I cannot refrain from quoting, in this connection, from one of Ibsen's letters to Georg Brandes (March 6, 1870), written after the rupture of his friendship with Björnson.—"You say that you have no friends at home. That is what I have fancied for a long time. When a man stands, as you do, in an intimately personal relationship to his life work, he cannot really expect to keep his 'friends.' But I believe that it is better for you that you go without leaving friends at home. Friends are an expensive luxury; and when a man's whole capital is invested in a calling and a mission in life, he cannot afford to keep them. The costliness of keeping friends does not lie in what one does for them, but in what one, out of consideration for them, refrains from doing. This means the crushing of many an intellectual germ. I have had personal experience of it; and there are, consequently, many years behind me during which it was not possible for me to be myself."

As Emperor Julian stands at the end of his course and everything crumbles about him, there is nothing which depresses his mind so deeply as the thought that all he has won amounts to this: to be remembered with respect by clear and cool heads, whereas his opponent was cherished lovingly by warm, living human hearts. This trait is the fruit of an experience; it owes its origin to a question which I at times have put to myself down there in my solitude.

On that occasion Ibsen was optimist enough to hope that an era of love was beginning to dawn for him. In vain; as the years passed, he retreated into himself more and more; and save for that Indian Summer of his life in Gossensass, the barriers that shut out his soul from warm intercourse with his fellow men grew apace.

Thus, through the tragedy of those three lives, withered and wasted for want of the warmth of love, we hear the heart-rending personal outcry of the old poet, as he felt the hand of ice next to his heart.

## XII

## WHEN WE DEAD AWAKEN

"When We Dead Awaken" was published in the closing days of the year 1899. It was destined to be Ibsen's farewell message to the world. A definite foreboding that with this drama his career had come to a close, must have guided Ibsen's hand in penning the subtitle: "A Dramatic Epilogue in Three Acts." As had always been his wont, he envisaged even this bitter truth without flinching. There is nothing to indicate that Ibsen meant to convey anything else in calling the Play an epilogue, even when he concedes to a friendly critic, some months later: "You are quite right when you say that the series which ends with the epilogue, really began with "The Master-Builder"; for with his customary caution he adds: "Into this subject, however, I do not care to enter further. I leave all commentaries and interpretations to you."[1] We shall never know exactly, of course, whether it was a revival of real hope or simply a perfectly understandable reluctance to commit himself in bald prose to the statement that his day was done, which made him continue:

I cannot say yet whether or not I shall write another drama; but if I continue to retain the vigor of mind and body which I at present enjoy, I do not imagine that I shall be able to keep permanently away from the old battlefields. However, if I were to make my appearance again, it would be with new weapons and in new armor.

[1] Letter to Moritz Prozor, March 6, 1900.

It was only ten days after this letter was written that Ibsen suffered a stroke. Even though it did not spell the immediate collapse of his mental faculties, it put an end to whatever lingering hopes he may have entertained of starting out on a fresh piece of work. He was stricken a second time in January 1901, but death did not come to his release until May 23, 1906.

As the last of a series of dramas, in which personal confession had more and more become the dominant chord, "When We Dead Awaken" is of priceless value to the student of Ibsen, the man and the artist. As a work of art, however, it falls so distinctly short of Ibsen's standards, that one is forced to the conclusion, Ibsen was no longer able to muster the necessary degree of concentration when he wrote it. We are told that, while writing the "Epilogue," he suffered acutely from the fear that his mind would give way under the strain before its completion. And this fear reflects, without doubt, Ibsen's consciousness of the fact that the results were not commensurate, in this last instance, with his efforts.

Save for the scenes between Maia and the Bear Hunter, there is scarcely a trace of dramatic action in "When We Dead Awaken." The analysis of the past is the axis around which the dialogue revolves. But whereas Ibsen formerly scored some of his greatest technical triumphs in the pursuance of the retrospective method, he fails, in this final attempt, to correlate the individual scenes, such as his mind's eye had seen them and noted them down. Facts brought out in the reminiscent dialogue of one scene conflict with those of another. All attempts to reconcile the notes we gather on various occasions as to the external facts of Rubek's career end in a hopeless tangle of irreconcilable contradictions.

The very first scene between Rubek and Maia contains a number of retrospective elements that are in flat contradiction to what we are told later. Boiled down to essentials, their first dialogue reveals the following facts:

Professor Rubek, a Norwegian sculptor, has spent so many years in foreign parts that he feels a stranger in the land of his birth. Somewhat over four years ago he returned to visit his native country, and on that occasion he met Maia, a young girl in modest middle-class circumstances, and persuaded her to become his wife and live abroad with him. Her reluctance to marry a man well along in years was overcome partly by the thought of his social position and of his comfortable income, and partly by the appeal to her imagination of his glowing promises. For Maia the change meant a widening of her whole life's horizon, largely as a result of her contact with a more cultivated set of people than her associates at home.

During the first two years or so of married life, Rubek was an indefatigable worker. Maia saw him busy from morning to night, bent on completing the great group which he had named The Resurrection Day. When it finally left his studio, it was acclaimed as a masterpiece; it made the rounds of all the great museums of the world; it brought its creator international fame, and in the wake of it he acquired wealth on a lavish scale. He was now able to build a magnificent city mansion and to make the decorations and furnishings of his villa on Lake Taunitz reflect the last word of comfort and luxury.[2] It was spacious enough, too, so that husband and wife need not always be getting in each other's way.

[2] Here, as in other passages, where the English translation deviates somewhat from the Norwegian text, I have tried to reproduce the sense of the original more accurately.

Since that time, however, Rubek has accomplished nothing to speak of. Only now and then he has tossed off a portrait bust for some plutocrat who could afford to pay the fabulous price which his art now commanded. For some time Maia has observed him becoming nervous and restless, and lately his condition has become so acute that he has begun to shun the sight of his fellow men.

The symptoms of his condition are quite plain to see. His mind is fagged, and his weariness takes the form of a cynicism which he makes no effort to disguise. He no longer thinks it worth while, he says, to work himself to death for the mob and the masses. He delights in telling Maia of the double-faced nature of his portrait busts, which amuses him the more as the public has entirely failed to detect the animal masks lurking behind the "striking likenesses" of his creation. He gets a cynical contentment out of the contemplation of his wealth and the security and independence it entails. In a calm and blasé manner he volunteers the fact that the glowing promises with which he lured Maia into marriage were nothing but a figure of speech which he had practiced with good effect on his schoolmates in bygone days (327-40).[3]

Now let us turn to the retrospective scene between husband and wife in Act II and study the version of Rubek's and Maia's past presented there (390-97).

To begin with, we get a glimpse of what their married life has been like. "Here have we two solitary people lived down there for four or five mortal years, and scarcely been an hour away from each other. We two all by ourselves." These are Maia's words, but as they pass without contradiction, we are entitled to regard the picture she sketches as fairly accurate. Rubek does not care for society, she

[3] The page references are to volume XI of the Scribner edition.

continues; and as she neither understands art nor is particularly interested in it, their common life has been dull and tedious. Rubek himself supplements her words by sketching a picture of the two of them sitting by the fireside, as is their habit, and whiling away the time by talking about inane trifles.

Pausing for a moment to compare this scene of domestic tedium with the sort of life sketched in the first scene, we are bound to be struck by differences not only of mood but of fact. In its context, the mention of the city mansion and of the stylish villa evokes a picture of a life of social intercourse. How, otherwise, could Rubek be reminding Maia that her horizon had been widened as a result of her now moving in a more cultured set of people than she had done at home? And in its context, Rubek's remark about the spaciousness of their living quarters is bound to suggest a domestic arrangement in which husband and wife are each habituated to pursuing their own respective interests. However, if these discrepancies between the two scenes can be at least partly explained away by making a maximum allowance for the change of mood, the same plea does not apply to what follows.

After some hedging Rubek has come out with the frank admission that he is utterly weary of their common life, and that what he craves is more stimulating companionship. Maia has guessed from the first that his mind has been occupied with the strange Lady, and he admits it when challenged by her direct question. As he alludes to the fact that she had been his model, and that she had left him—vanished without a word—Maia interrupts him by asking point-blank: "Then you accepted me as a sort of makeshift, I suppose?" To which he replies rather brusquely:

Something of the sort, to tell the truth, little Maia. For a year or a year and a half I had lived there lonely and brooding, and had put the last touch—the very last touch, to my work. "The Resurrection Day" went out over the world and brought me fame—and everything else that heart could desire. (With greater warmth.) But I no longer loved my own work. Men's laurels and incense nauseated me, till I could have rushed away in despair and hidden myself in the depths of the woods.

Then, he continues, he took to making portrait busts to order, with animal faces behind the masks; but this was an inconsequential matter, compared to the new idea that had taken possession of his mind. "All the talk about the artist's vocation and the artist's mission, and so forth, began to strike me as being very empty, and hollow, and meaningless at bottom." He felt himself filled with a craving for a life in sunshine and beauty; he was tired of hanging about in a raw, damp hole, and wearing himself out in a perpetual struggle with lumps of clay and blocks of stone. "And then I had become rich enough to live in luxury and in indolent, quivering sunshine," he muses. "I was able to build myself the villa on the lake and the palazzo in the capital,—and all the rest of it." "And last but not least," Maia chimes in, "you could afford to treat yourself to me, too. And you gave me leave to share in all your treasures."

To any one who reads it should be apparent that this version of Rubek's past glaringly contradicts the account given in the first scene. There we were unmistakably told that Rubek did not complete his masterpiece until some two years after his marriage; that his resorting to commercial portrait sculpture and his nervous discontent were matters of recent date. We were led to infer that his great wealth had come only in the wake of the fame he acquired through

this work, and that he has built his sumptuous mansion—referred to by both of them as new—only within the last year or two. Here, on the contrary, we are told that he finished his masterpiece, sent it out over the world, acquired fame and wealth, took to portrait sculpture, lost interest in his art, became seized with a hunger for life, and built his palatial house and villa,—all before he ever married Maia. Here are two different sets of facts, and neither can be made to yield to the other by any manner of interpretation. Each scene is a consistent unit in itself, but there is no room for both to stand alongside of one another in the same drama.

The second of the Rubek-Maia scenes, as we may conveniently call them, is not simply at variance, however, with the first; it conflicts also with the retrospective content of the dialogues between Rubek and Irene.

We can briefly epitomize the relevant portions of the two Rubek-Irene scenes, which constitute, roughly speaking, the second half of the first two acts, as follows:

Scene One. When Irene entered into Rubek's life, he was still young and poor. At that time he was sick with the desire to achieve the great work of his life, which was to be a symbolical representation of the Resurrection Day. In Irene he found the perfect incarnation of his idea, as he then conceived it. He persuaded her to be his model, and in the course of some three or four years, during which she was wholly devoted to his service, he created the statue of a female figure that he felt at the time to be a flawless expression of his lofty idea. Then, when his clay model seemed perfect and complete, Irene suddenly disappeared without a trace. Now that he has found her again, he answers her inquiry as to what he has created in the interval, by confessing that he has made no poems in marble since

the day she left him: he has only frittered away his life in modeling.

Scene Two, in part an almost verbatim repetition of Scene One, supplements the first. Rubek dwells again on the fact that he was young when he met her, and "with no knowledge of life," as he now adds. With an effort he goes on to tell her that he learned worldly wisdom in the years that followed her departure. And his changed outlook on life brought about a modification of his poetic conception of the Resurrection Day. The single ideal figure no longer satisfied him; it lacked the complexity that was characteristic of life, as he now saw it. So he recast his whole plan. He modeled a segment of the curving, bursting earth. Up from the fissures of its soil swarm men and women with dimly suggested animal-faces. A symbolical representation of his own guilt-laden personality occupies the foreground. And the original statue, the radiance of its face somewhat toned down, has been incorporated into the group; and now, set somewhat further back than the middle, it occupies a position that makes it an organic member of the whole.

The two Rubek-Irene scenes are in essential harmony. Although Rubek's claim in the first, that he has created no more poems in marble but only pottered around, since Irene left him, is obviously contradicted by his sketch of the great group in the second, this contradiction may well be explained by Rubek's variable moods. It is entirely plausible that his unquestionably poetic conception should seem to him, under the influence of one mood, the great masterpiece which all the world has acclaimed it, and that under the dominance of another he should disparagingly refer to it as mere pottering. As said above, however, these scenes contain elements that are impossible to reconcile with the

picture of Rubek's development as sketched in the second Rubek-Maia scene.

According to the second Rubek-Irene scene, the sculptor was young and wholly inexperienced when Irene left him. He acquired his worldly wisdom in the years that followed, and it was only then that he conceived and finally executed the ambitious group. Now the acquiring of worldly wisdom is, obviously, a slow process; and it is equally obvious that the execution in marble of so complex a group must have required years of the most assiduous effort. Ten years were a relatively small space of time to allow for such a development of personality and for such an extensive piece of work; twice that number of years might represent a guess coming closer to the truth.

According to the second Rubek-Maia scene, however, *only a year, or a year and a half at most,* elapsed between Irene's sudden disappearance and Rubek's putting the last touch to The Resurrection Day. The wording of the text, moreover, gives the impression as though Rubek's fame and wealth had followed almost overnight. How, else, would there be any point in his conceding that he married Maia as a makeshift, after Irene's departure? One does not resort to makeshifts for losses whose sting has been dulled by the passage of time.[4]

There is no question but that the play as a whole brands the time-reckoning of the second Rubek-Maia scene as impossible, even though the sequence of events as presented there may be preferred to the version of the first scene. Rubek's age alone makes it impossible. He is described in the stage notes to Act I as an elderly gentleman, and his

[4] In the same scene, however, a few pages back, we also meet with a passage like the following: "*Maia.* Oh, I know you knew her very well indeed—long before you knew me. *Professor Rubek.* And had forgotten her, too—long before I knew you" (388).

age is harped on repeatedly. Maia reminds him that time is passing, that it is preparing to take leave of him, and that it is this, at bottom, which makes him so uneasy (391). Irene strokes his hair and says: "You dear, great, ageing child!" (418-19). All this leaves no doubt that, reckoning conservatively, Rubek must be pretty close to sixty. This would make him fifty-five at the time of his marriage. How old could he have been when he met Irene? He was young and inexperienced; so let us assume he was thirty, which would make him thirty-four, when Irene left him. This would put an interval of twenty-one years between the end of that "episode" and his marriage,—a reasonable length of time for him to grow in experience, to conceive and execute his great group, to reap fame and wealth and to become surfeited with his art. Again, using Rubek's age as a starting-point, we can determine that of Irene with a fair degree of accuracy. She could scarcely have been less than eighteen when she met him. This would make her about forty-eight at the time of their reunion, although I must confess that I, for one, picture her as a much younger looking woman.[5]

It is a painful task to pick this work to pieces and show up flaws such as would scarcely occur in the work of a sec-

[5] Several months after the completion of this chapter I chanced across an anecdote affording rather remarkable proof of my contention that Ibsen's dramatic vision had begun to fail him. On page 19 of his introduction to "From Ibsen's Workshop" William Archer reproduces an incident related by the dramatist Gunnar Heiberg in the Christiania *Aftenpost*, for April 16, 1911. "The Norwegian actress who played Irene in the original production gave her a rather juvenile appearance,—with Ibsen's approval, it was reported. 'Tell me, Dr. Ibsen,' Heiberg said to him one day, 'how old is Irene?' He replied, 'Irene is 28 years old.'

'That is impossible,' said I.

He looked at me, measured me up and down, and said, with crushing quietness, 'You naturally know better, don't you?'

'Yes, I do,' I answered. And I set to work to prove that Irene must be at least 40 years old. . . .

ond-rater. It is pathetic to think of the frenzy with which Ibsen threw himself into this theme, for fear lest he should collapse before its completion. But it would be doing poor honor to his memory to gloss over his failure.

So far our study has shown that Ibsen's mind was no longer able to cope with the complexity of dramatic composition. In other respects, too, "When We Dead Awaken" shows a marked inferiority of technique. Ibsen's accustomed smoothness in the handling of the exposition is absent. In the first scene Rubek and Maia rehearse their past rather obviously for the reader's benefit. Another conspicuous weakness is the absence of any genuine dramatic tension: the dialogue is painfully lacking in this dynamic quality; and Irene's furtive play with her knife, designed as it is to keep our nerves on edge, is a device that Ibsen would scarcely have resorted to in his prime. Again, the reader must be struck by the fact that the dialogue harbors occasional bits of symbolical phrasing that seem out of place in their setting and give the impression of having been culled from Ibsen's earlier dramas. I am thinking of Rubek's bitter remark to Maia, that laming birds' wings by careless shooting has long been a pastime of hers (429); and of Irene's picturing of her ascent to the peak with

'Irene is supposed to be 28,' Ibsen interrupted me. 'And why do you ask, since you know all about it?'

He went away annoyed.

Next day I received a letter from him, which ran thus:

'Dear Gunnar Heiberg, You were right and I was wrong. I have looked up my notes. Irene is about 40 years old.

'Yours,

'Henrik Ibsen.'"

I was delighted, naturally, to see my feeling confirmed, that Ibsen pictured Irene as a much younger woman than the chronology of the Play warrants. The discrepancy between Heiberg's assumption and my own, regarding Irene's age, is based, of course, on a divergence of opinion as to the age of Sculptor Rubek.

Rubek as passing "through all the mists, and then right up to the summit of the tower (!) that shines in the sunrise." (455). The symbolism of the tower is clearly an echo from "The Master-Builder," while that of the wounded bird recalls both "The Master-Builder" and "The Wild Duck." [6]

Seeing Ibsen's craftmanship so visibly on the decline, we can scarcely expect his genius for creating living characters to assert itself undimmed in this drama. While the judgment of critics shows a wide divergence on this point, my own feeling is that not one of the four characters pulses with any real life. Our analysis has made it apparent that in the person of Rubek the thoughts and emotions crying in Ibsen's own self for expression, have crystallized but imperfectly into an intuition. Irene moves at his side more like an automaton than like a living person, save for the occasional flashes of spontaneity that light up her dead eyes for brief moments. Maia and her burly huntsman are designed to form a vivid contrast to Rubek's and Irene's spent existences; but for all his strong language Ulfheim remains quite shadowy. The sentimental note he strikes, after his cave man tactics have met with no success, is as surprising as it is unconvincing. His suggestion to Maia that, both of them having met with mishap, they might try tacking their poor shreds of life together, sounds like an echo of Krogstad's and Christina Linde's resolution to brave life anew, by joining their shattered existences. As to Maia, I confess to feeling quite uncertain how to interpret her reaction to Ulfheim's question: "Can we part, we two?" Does

[6] Another matter, perhaps not too trivial to mention, is this: In the Norwegian text each bit of dialogue is preceded not only by the name of the speaker but by the person's title as well. The characters are always introduced as *Professor* Rubek, *Fru* (*Frau*) Maia, and *Godsejer* (landed proprietor) Ulfheim. Is there not something labored even about this gratuitous repetition?

she genuinely succumb to his wooing and to the lure of being mistress over miles of splendid hunting-grounds, or is her fear of being abandoned in the perilous descent by her rough guide so great that she prefers to give an equivocal promise and tolerate the feel of his shaggy arm around her waist, as he carries her down to safety? I do not know, any more than I can determine from her relation to Rubek whether she has any depth or substance. In different scenes, in different parts of the same scene, in fact, she gives the impression of being several distinct persons. In the initial scene one gets quite a definite picture of her as a serious, level-headed, somewhat grave and disillusioned little person, who feels rather hurt by Rubek's patronizing condescension and by his attempts to treat her as a mere child. She seems genuinely concerned on Rubek's account; her thwarted mother impulse is soberly but pointedly revealed in her reference to their mansion as a house instead of a home; in her reminder to Rubek, of how he had lured the young girl into marriage by the appeal of a suggestive phrase, there is a note of sad reproach; and when he tries to turn it aside with a jest, there is a simple dignity about her rejoinder: "I did not go with you only to play." Only a few moments later, however, when Rubek questions the Inspector about the two figures he saw from his window in the darkness, Maia displays a tactlessness and then an unreasonable jealousy about Rubek's past, which are scarcely in keeping with her contours as we have begun to perceive them. And when she returns, after having watched the feeding of Ulfheim's dogs, and pleads for permission to accompany the huntsman, she acts altogether the teasing, coaxing child, accustomed to having her wishes treated as whims by a rather stern guardian whose authority she does not dare to challenge. In her delight upon seeing Rubek

enter into her wishes with such unexpected readiness, the recent humiliation is completely forgotten; there is no room in her head for any feeling beside that of a child's spontaneous gratitude. The second act, instead of clarifying her contours, only confuses them further. In former days, Ibsen's genius had created such subtle blendings of childhood and womanhood as the characters of Nora and Hilda, but here in Maia, Ibsen's intuition fails him, and the organic unity of character is absent. At moments Maia acts the child again, as when she wants to sit on Rubek's knee, and there is something impish—or is it silly?—in her laughing at his solemnity. Sometimes she seems quite obstinately brainless in her way of flaunting her indifference to his art, and there is something hard about her frank impatience with the idea of sharing his thoughts and his interests. Then, again, she is self-possessed and dignified, as when she tells him, with a complete absence of rhetorical pathos, that she is ready to leave him at any minute, in case he desires to be rid of her; and her calm remark that these words can not have been meant as a threat, shows a grasp of the realities of the situation which is most astonishing in view of her jealous disposition. Altogether puzzling is the readiness with which she accedes to Rubek's suggestion of a ménage *à trois*. Does she seriously think of trying the experiment? Or is her determination to leave Rubek so definitely fixed that she doesn't think it worth while to waste any words about the matter? And what is going on in her mind, as she listens to Rubek's confession about the casket of sculptor's visions that has snapped to, and to which no one but Irene holds the key? With a subtle smile, which she tries to repress, she tells him, he must get Irene to unlock it for him, and seeing him astonished at her reply, she continues: "My dear Rubek—is it worth while to make all

this fuss and commotion about so simple a matter?" Is Maia here simply mastering her feelings with an admirable degree of tact? Or has their common life touched the emotional side of her nature so little that she should not even feel a pang, now that their ways are going to part? Or, finally, is her capacity for understanding so limited, that she thinks his utterance the confession of a man who is crazy? Each of these three interpretations seems possible; yet none of them makes the elements of her behavior crystallize into organic unity. Nor does the third act supply the intuition that is wanting. In her last meeting with Rubek the child comes to the fore again. She confesses to being afraid of the tame bird of prey that guards her. She applauds Ulfheim as he speaks of giving him a shot between the wings. But face to face with Rubek, she has to justify her presence on the heights at that hour by reminding him that he gave her permission to go. Of the inability to make out her intentions with regard to Ulfheim I have spoken above. All in all, I see in Maia outstanding proof of the failure of Ibsen's powers of intuition.

No such unsteadiness of outline, at any rate, blurs the contours of Irene's figure. If she seems like an automaton or like a specter rather than a flesh and blood individual, this is due to the uniformly symbolical quality of her language. But her image is a perfectly coherent whole.

We must think of Irene as convalescing after a long and violent attack of insanity. This is the burden of her symbolism, as she harps on the theme of what she calls her death. Now she feels herself gradually awakening to life again, after having been dead for many years. They had laced her arms behind her back and lowered her into a vault with padded walls, where her shrieks died away unheard. It would be a mistake to think of her harping on her death

as the fixed idea of a maniac: that is what it must have been during the years of her insanity, but now she is at least dimly aware of the fact that she is speaking in symbols. Her preoccupation with the idea of death is admirably motivated: During four years Irene had hypnotized herself day after day into a state of religious exaltation, in which her whole conscious life came to be reduced to a living impersonation of the ideal woman rising from the dead. She had identified herself so completely with Rubek's idea, that when her mind gave way, her mania transformed the symbolism of the statue into a pathological obsession. Now Irene is on the road to recovery. It still costs her a visible effort to focus her mind on any thought; she still feels her mind controlled by spirits who release their hold on her only now and then; and she still has a maniacal desire to kill.

The complexity of Irene's emotional life is clearly exposed in her attitude toward Rubek. Love for the man is blended with hatred of the artist. Stronger than both is her craving for motherhood. She had devoted herself so gladly to Rubek's service, because she thought of the model that took shape out of the wet clay as their common child. She holds him guilty of what she calls her death. After the analogy of the temptation of Christ, she thinks of him as a kind of Satan who lured her up a high mountain and showed her all the glory of the world. And she fell at his feet and served him (370), and worshipped him (426). And she gave him her young living soul (379), and he killed it (418). At the time she left him, the conflict of her love with an undercurrent of hate must still have been largely subconscious; for, recalling the circumstances of her departure, Irene says: "When I had served you with my soul and with my body —when the statue stood there finished—our child as you called it—then I laid at your feet the most precious sacrifice

of all—by effacing myself for all time." If the symbol of laying the most precious sacrifice at his feet means anything, it must mean she left him in order that she might not stand in the way of his continuing to grow and to create. But when Rubek replies that all she thereby accomplished was to lay waste his life, she fires up: "It was just *that* I wanted! Never, never should you create anything again—after you had created that only child of ours." As explanations of her departure, many years ago, the two motives stand in flat contradiction to each other; but as expressing the complexity and the instability of her emotional state at the moment of their utterance, this lightning-quick change from love to hate is a masterly touch of psychological intuition. Her conscious hatred of the artist and of his art had doubtless been a development coming after her departure—a rebound from a love that had been keyed to the most exalted pitch of self-abnegation. The element of hatred must have gradually detached itself from the complex, fluid mass of her emotion, as her memory returned again and again to the scene of their last meeting which she still remembers so vividly: "You took both my hands and pressed them warmly. And I stood there in breathless expectation. And then you said: 'So now, Irene, I thank you from my heart. This,' you said, 'has been a priceless episode for me.' "

Rubek cannot remember having uttered those words. He is not in the habit of using the word episode, he says doubtingly. But to avoid an argument he concedes with assumed cheerfulness: "Well, well—after all, it was in reality an episode." Then Irene drops the subject. She scatters some rose-leaves in the brook and reminds him of how they used to play with swans and boats—water-lilies and leaves—in the days gone by, as they sat by the peasant's hut on the shore of Lake Taunitz. Now they play that game again,

as though anything but play were futile. But inadvertently their minds drift back to the present; Rubek must needs tell her of the great, handsome and comfortable villa he has built on the site where the peasant's hut used to stand; he hasn't enough imagination left to perceive how this announcement must cut her to the quick. He is feeling his way forward, of course, with a view to asking her to share his life and inspire his art anew. As though he hadn't grasped the fact that his art had become an abomination in her sight since the time when she left him, and doubly so since he had told her of how he had tampered with their common child! When he comes out directly, at last, imploring her to help him live his life over again, she answers: "Empty dreams! Idle—dead dreams. For the life you and I led there is no resurrection." And once more they play with the leaves and the petals.

In the last scene, in the pale light of early morning, Irene sums up the significance of their futile play of the evening before. Ulfheim's threat, that he would send men with ropes to fetch them, by force, if necessary, has reawakened Irene's maniacal terror of her keeper. They shall not get her alive, she tells Rubek, and she confides to him that she carries a knife both night and day.

*Professor Rubek.* Give me that knife, Irene!

*Irene.* (Concealing it.) You shall not have it. I may very likely find a use for it myself.

*Professor Rubek.* What use can you have for it, here?

*Irene.* (Looks fixedly at him.) It was intended for *you,* Arnold.

*Professor Rubek.* For me!

*Irene.* As we were sitting by the Lake of Taunitz last evening—

*Professor Rubek.* By the Lake of—

*Irene.* Outside the peasant's hut—and playing with swans and water-lilies—

*Professor Rubek.* What then—what then?

*Irene.* —and when I heard you say with such deathly, icy coldness—that it was nothing but an episode in your life—

*Professor Rubek.* It was *you* that said *that,* Irene, not I.

*Irene.* (Continuing.) —then I had my knife out. I wanted to stab you in the back with it.

*Professor Rubek.* (Darkly.) And why did you stay your hand?

*Irene.* Because it flashed upon me with a sudden horror that you were dead already—long ago.

*Professor Rubek.* Dead?

*Irene.* Dead. Dead, you as well as I. We sat there by the Lake of Taunitz, we two clay-cold bodies—and played with each other. (451-2.)

What Irene says seems incoherent and like a new attack of insanity beclouding her mind if we take her allusion to Lake Taunitz and the peasant's hut literally and think of the events she is rehearsing as having happened a great many years ago. But she says distinctly that all this happened *last night.* And so it did, and all is perfectly lucid, the moment we perceive that she is using the Lake and the hut as symbols for the bank of the brook. She and Rubek had been sitting by the water last evening and playing with petals and sending out a fleet of boats—just as they had used to do in by-gone times, by the Lake of Taunitz, outside the peasant's hut. It was last evening that Rubek conceded their life had been, after all, an episode,—words that struck her with a deathly, icy coldness; words that made her realize, along with what followed, that this man sitting beside her was but the hollow shell of his past; that he, too, had long ago ceased to live. And it was last eve-

ning that she had drawn her knife, three different times, to thrust it into his back.[7]

He cannot tempt her now to try life anew with him, in love and passion. "The love that belongs to the life of earth," she replies, "the beautiful, miraculous earth-life—the inscrutable earth-life—that is dead in both of us." . . . "The desire for life is dead in me, Arnold. Now I have arisen. And I look for you. And I find you. And then I see that you and life lie dead—as I have lain." And, identifying herself wholly with the statue she had inspired, she repeats: "The young woman of your Resurrection Day can see all life lying on its bier."

The stage notes are not very explicit. But we must suppose something of the radiance of the statue to transfigure the mask of her face at these last words, because of their effect upon Rubek. For up to this moment he has attempted in vain to make her see life with his eyes. He has fought her pronouncement, that he, too, is dead. But now, as though by a miracle, the psychic momentum of her words carries her vision through his defenses, so that he perceives himself as she beholds him. And now, for the first time, the weights that bound him down to earth drop from his shoulders, and he rises to a gesture of spontaneous passion. And now she responds to his embrace, herself carried away by the fire she has kindled, and they set out toward the

[7] The German translation, usually a far more painstakingly exact and idiomatic rendering of the Norwegian original than the English (owing to the great similarity between the German and Norwegian idioms) totally destroys the coherence of Irene's character, by deliberately mistranslating the phrase *"last* night" (*i aftes* in the original) as *"one* night." Supposing for a moment that she had actually harbored the plan of killing him some twenty odd years ago, and that she had stayed her hand only because she perceived that he, too, was already dead,—what then becomes of her claim that, in leaving him, she had laid the most precious sacrifice at his feet?

mountain top, to hold their marriage feast in the full light of the morning sun.

The situation recalls the delirious exaltation of Rosmer and Rebecca, as they smilingly set out to be joined together in voluntary death. No marriage feast could fit the mood of these two wanderers on the heights, save the rapture of meeting death together in close embrace. The avalanche sweeping down upon them anticipates the solution which they would have found of their own seeking before the next setting of the sun.

I have somewhere remarked that Solness, Allmers and, in a measure, even Borkman, are felt as projections of Ibsen's own self, actual or potential. Professor Rubek, however, comes much closer than any of them to being a portrait likeness of Ibsen as he saw himself. Not down to every external detail of fact, of course. Rubek is considerably younger than the poet of the "Epilogue." There was neither a Maia nor an Irene in Ibsen's life. Ibsen never commercialized his art. He never tried the experiment of forgetting about art and leading a life of indolent enjoyment. And the lock of Ibsen's shrine did not snap after the completion of a masterpiece. In spite of this we feel the poet's own eyes peering at us from behind the almost transparent mask of Rubek's countenance.

On point after point Rubek's career and personality correspond strikingly to Ibsen's own. Artists both of them, they have won their laurels abroad; and when they return home to Norway at last, it is only to discover that they are hopelessly out of sympathy with their countrymen. Rubek's remark about the audible silence that he feels pressing upon him here at home; his unforgettable description of the tedious all-night journey by train—they might have found

their way into Ibsen's own letters just as they stand. And his discovery, that the people have changed a little perhaps, "and not at all in the direction of amiability," reflects Ibsen's indelibly ingrained bitterness toward everything Norwegian. "Here all the sounds are closed, in every sense of the word," is the refrain of Ibsen's musings in Christiania. Even at this late date he has not forgiven or forgotten Norway's defection in 1864, from the cause of Denmark, as shown by the following incident. On April 1, 1898, addressing a Copenhagen audience, he harks back to the dark days of 1864; he sketches his own journey southward by way of Copenhagen, Germany and Austria; he recalls the overwhelming experience of being bathed in a flood of Italian sunlight, after passing through the gloom of the Alpine tunnel; and he confesses to having again experienced something akin to this feeling, a day ago, on beholding the expanse of the Öre-Sound before him. (Having come directly from Norway, could he have made his meaning more plain?) And by way of a climax he adds: "And then I saw the true-blue eye of the Dane." [8] We do not get the full poignancy of this epithet, unless we bear in mind the corresponding epithet that characterizes the Norwegian eye, as Ibsen saw it. "Those cold, uncomprehending Norwegian eyes," he had once called them in a letter to Björnson,[9] and the identical phrase about the cold, uncomprehending eyes of his countrymen recurs in another letter, six months later,[10] thereby indicating sufficiently the fixity of the image in Ibsen's mind. That had been thirteen years ago, but Ibsen's memory was not of the kind that easily forgets.

On the question of his happiness Ibsen might also have

[8] "Og dernaest fandt jeg her de danske trofaste ojne."
[9] September 29, 1884.
[10] To Ludvig Josephson, April 9, 1885.

expressed himself in Rubek's identical words. "After all there is a certain happiness in feeling oneself free and independent on every hand—in having at one's command everything one can possibly wish for—all outward things, that is to say." Ibsen never concealed the satisfaction it gave him to see his prudent investments bear fruit. His letters to his publisher, who also managed his investments, show that he took considerable pride in the feeling that he was successful in a practical way, too. But Rubek, as well as Ibsen, feels how wretched a substitute this satisfaction is for the "real, inward happiness" that cannot be bought.

Again, it might be Ibsen speaking in the first person, when Rubek vents his impatience over the public's lack of comprehension. "All the world knows nothing! Understands nothing!" he growls. What the public fancies to divine is "something that isn't there at all, yes. Something that never was in my mind. Ah, yes, *that* they can go into ecstasies over." And as for the cynical delight the old sculptor takes in his double-faced portraits, those masked animal-faces,—our study of "Little Eyolf" has exposed the art of double-faced portraiture as one of the secrets of Ibsen's own workshop.

In the career of Solness, once a pious builder of churches, after his revolt a builder of homes for men, we discerned a definite analogy to the development of Ibsen's art. The same is the case, only to a much greater degree, with Rubek's development, as it is reflected in the great symbolical group. Rubek's masterpiece embodied the three phases of his development: He had spent his youth in striving to give expression to the ideal, such as his inner eye beheld it, and he had brought a religious fervor to his task. Then, as he grew older and wiser in worldly experience, the ideal had receded from its position of exclusive importance in his

mind; he became engrossed with the study of the actual world of men as he saw it, and he modeled a great group of realistic figures, representing all the different types he had discerned. Finally his gaze turned inward once more, but not in a renewed search for the ideal; he now searched his own heart and scanned his own features; and he did not feel the great group to be complete, until he had added to the foreground a figure representing himself, earth-bound and remorseful.

> In front, beside a fountain—sits a man weighed down with guilt, who cannot quite free himself from the earth-crust. I call him remorse for a forfeited life. He sits there and dips his fingers in the purling stream—to wash them clean—and he is gnawed and tortured by the thought that never, never will he succeed. Never in all eternity will he attain to freedom and the new life. He will remain forever prisoned in his hell.

The three successive elements of Rubek's Resurrection Day—the expression of the ideal, the representation of the world as it is, the portrayal of the artist's own self—they symbolize transparently the three phases of Ibsen's own development. It needs hardly to be remarked that these three successive phases of Ibsen's art are not separated by any hard and fast lines. They overlap each other and blend with one another. But roughly speaking, Ibsen's idealistic phase came to a close with "Emperor and Galilean"; and, again, "The Master-Builder" marks the epoch where Ibsen's interest in the realistic portrayal of the outside world began to recede in favor of a more and more exclusive preoccupation with his own self.

But I think we run danger of missing something of the spirit of the "Epilogue," if we concentrate merely on the analogy of Rubek's masterpiece to the three phases of

Ibsen's art as a consecutive series. The analogy Ibsen had in mind extends further. Just as Rubek's masterpiece is an organic whole, despite the transformation of the original inspiring idea, so Ibsen feels all the works he has created, however they differ in style, to be integral phases of one consistent development.

"People believe that I have changed my views in the course of time,"—he said to a friend in the spring of 1881. "This is a great mistake. My development has, as a matter of fact, been absolutely consistent. I myself can distinctly follow and indicate the thread of its whole course—the unity of my ideas and their gradual development." [11]

Ibsen must still have been guided by the same idea, in picturing Rubek's great group as including within the compass of a single organic whole the successive stages of its author's spiritual history. His own work likewise, he felt as being one and indivisible.

Rubek's lifework, as first conceived, and as finally executed, is the expression of an *idea*. The idealism of his youth, the realism of his manhood, the self-portraiture to which he finally turned,—they all contribute, at bottom, to the expression of the same idea. In his portrayal of the real and the particular he has never lost sight of the ideal. The lifelike portraits he carved out of stone were never *mere* portraits. They were made at the same time to serve the expression of a vision to which his whole life was consecrated. And so it was with Ibsen. As he grew in experi-

[11] Quoted from the Memoirs of L. Dietrichson, in the introduction to the American edition of Ibsen's letters, p. 1. New York. Fox, Duffield. 1905. See also Ibsen's letter, "Til Laeserne" (To the Reader), dated March, 1898, reproduced in facsimile after the title-page of volume I of the Samlede Vaerker (København, 1898), where Ibsen reaffirms that all he has written represents a "coherent, continuous whole."

ence, his method changed, and his focus shifted. The ideal ceased to dominate his attention exclusively, but it was never lost sight of. It is present in his work as an undercurrent from first to last.

If Rubek's masterpiece, as we have seen, reflects the three phases of Ibsen's life work and their fundamental unity, what, then, are we to think of the doubts that assail Rubek as to the quality of his work since he forsook idealism and turned realist? "The Resurrection Day *is* a masterpiece!" he tells Maia with passionate emphasis. "Or *was* one in the beginning," he corrects himself. "No, it is one still. It *must, must, must* be a masterpiece!" To Irene he says that he has created no poems in marble, just pottered around, since she left him. To Maia he confesses that after his great group stood complete, he no longer loved his own work. Men's laurels and incense nauseated him, till he felt like rushing away in despair and hiding himself in the depths of the woods. Can it be possible that Rubek's doubt reflects a similar despondency gnawing at Ibsen's heart, as he contemplates his own life work?

That is indeed a conclusion from which there is no escaping. If it directly contradicts what we said above, it does so in the way one mood will contradict another. Perhaps I should have prefaced this analysis with the reminder, that this last dramatic confession of Ibsen's is less than ever a matter of expressing settled convictions; it is wholly a matter of conflicting moods, alternating like flood- and ebb-tide; and if we are looking for a positive, unequivocal message, casting up the balance of the poet's life work, we shall keep looking in vain.

There is no doubt that Ibsen is here assailed by moods in which all the work of his ripe manhood appears to him as mere pottering—all the work, that is to say, of portray-

ing the men and women of his time in their social environment; all the work of probing and sounding into the depths of the human soul. His is the tragic despair of the analyst who, bewildered by the complexity of the phenomena he has unearthed, cannot find his way back to a synthesis. How wonderful, how pure, how simple, in contrast to his present confusion, does that epoch of his life now appear to him, when he had been like a voice in the wilderness, proclaiming his message of absolute idealism, with its clear-cut alternatives: All or Nothing! How vivid the contrast between the Dionysian enthusiasm then animating him, and the slowly, cautiously groping sobriety of his later method!

But he knows moments of an even more acute pessimism than this,—moments in which everything crumbles, in which a taint cleaves even to the creations of his early idealism. We recall the promise by which Rubek had won Irene to his cause. Those high-sounding words, in which he promised to take her up a high mountain and show her all the glory of the world; words in which his very soul seemed to come to the surface—what had they been but a sort of figure of speech, a schoolboy phrase, tried many a time with telling effect on his boyhood chums! What a dubious light is shed on the purity of his zeal by the admission that he had practiced the art of the glib phrase-maker on the very incarnation of his ideal! Here Rubek is Ibsen, exposing the fundamental duplicity of all ideal endeavor: it is the most discouraging lesson self-analysis has taught him. Rubek-Ibsen makes the admission with a cynical candor that betrays even more poignantly the weariness of utter exhaustion than did the Master-Builder's despairing outcry, "Nothing really built. Nor anything sacrificed for the chance of building. Nothing, nothing, the whole is nothing!"

The foreground figure of Rubek's group—that man by the fountain, bowed down with guilt, vainly trying to wash his hands clean, vainly struggling to rise from the clod: a symbol of remorse over a forfeited life—this is Ibsen as he sees himself when the mood of black despair settles upon him, when his whole life wears the aspect of one great tragic failure.

A failure from three distinct points of view. A failure morally, as betokened by his sickly conscience, by his ever-increasing sense of guilt. A failure artistically, from the time he had forsaken the high plane of ideal art and turned to analytical realism. A failure, lastly, in having cast his whole life in the wrong mold from the outset, by having pursued the phantom of art instead of putting his energies at the disposition of life.

The relation of life to art is the pivot on which the thought of the "Epilogue" turns. Is the devotion of a whole life to art worth while, in the last analysis? so runs the question over which Ibsen broods and which he despairs of answering. And of what use is an answer to him now that it is too late? With Irene he muses: "We see the irretrievable only when we dead awaken. We see that we have never lived."

With Rubek he asks himself: Is not a life in sunshine and in beauty a hundred times better worth while than the eternal martyrdom of artistic endeavor? His sense of exhaustion and his futile yearning for the irretrievable would supply the answer; and yet he realizes that the question is meaningless when applied to a nature such as his. He might live his life a thousand times over, and yet it would turn out each time to be the same; for "I was *born* to be an artist," he says with Rubek. "And do what I may, I shall never be anything else." Rubek has tried the experi-

ment of mere living. It has been a signal failure. "I have come to realize," he confesses, "that I am not at all adapted for seeking happiness in indolent enjoyment. Life does not shape itself that way for me and those like me. I must go on working—producing one work after another—right up to my dying day." And does not the last phase of Rubek's life bear out the truth of his insight? Having found Irene again, he yearns to reunite her life with his. But what is at the bottom of this yearning? Not the longing to atone for the past by a life of love, but the same feverish frenzy of artistic creation which Irene so hotly scores. He has begun to reawaken to his real life, he tells Maia,—which is his way of saying that once more he feels consumed with the desire to create something that will absorb his whole being in the task. And because Irene had once inspired him to his greatest work, and because he remembers how exultantly happy he felt during the first phase of its execution, he clutches at the hope that her presence will inspire him a second time. She holds the key, he fancies, to the locked shrine that contains the store of his creative ideas. He would persuade her to unlock it for him once more. Only when this last hope has failed him, when the finality of Irene's negative answer has put the quietus on his artist's yearning—only then does he surrender unreservedly to the conviction that he had been a fool all his life. Now he repents of his blindness for having "placed the dead clay-image above the happiness of life—of love." But even if he is right at last,—what is the use of an insight which, in the nature of things, can dawn upon a personality like his only when it is too late? He may die, cursing the art that cheated him out of his life; yet he could have lived no other life than that of the artist.

However Ibsen may turn the problem, he comes to the

conclusion that the course of his life was foredoomed because of the nature of his personality. That is the upshot of the relation that characterizes the life of Rubek and Irene as artist and model. The religious fervor of the young artist was such that he had to lift his model above the plane of an object of earthly desire, in order to accomplish his task. "The superstition took hold of me that if I touched you, if I desired you with my senses, my soul would be profaned, so that I should be unable to accomplish what I was striving for. And I still think there was some truth in that," he now adds. He is utterly right. Granting him to have felt about it as he did, he would have destroyed her significance as the incarnation of the ideal, had he yielded to the desire to possess her. He would neither have achieved his great statue, nor would he have found the happiness that might have been theirs in a life of love. Love would have turned into hate under the sting of remorse, as he thought of the ideal abandoned for a brief gratification of the senses.

That Rubek controlled his passion, that he did not let her loveliness tempt him, is altogether to his credit, showing as it does the spiritual intensity of concentration of which he was capable. But that he *had* to feel as he did, that the keeping of life at arm's length was the indispensable condition to his envisaging of the ideal: that is the crux of his tragedy. Unlike the old Italian artists, it was not given to him to model his Madonna in the image of a mistress. His ideal, by definition, excluded a reconciliation with life. It demanded sacrifices felt, in the end, as so great, as to raise the question: Which was the greater value, in the last analysis,—the ideal for which no sacrifices had been too great, or the warm, pulsing life sacrificed to the fetish of the ideal? And this is the question Ibsen ponders in casting up the balance of his life.

The hot denunciations of the artist which Ibsen puts into the mouth of Irene, show him wincing, as he applies the lash to himself. In her mouth the word "artist" has a ring of harsh contempt. There is an even crueller sarcasm in her intonation of the word "poet." From the point of view of a warm-blooded human being there is something inhuman, something positively perverse in the artist's detachment. His reduction of all experience to the status of episodes, to be fed into the ever-hungry Moloch of his art, is the work of a monomaniac. This exclusive passion for transforming life into make-believe is idolatrous, monstrous and diabolical.

So runs the burden of Irene's invectives, and they are the poet's own accusations, levelled against himself. Yet, even though the voice of accusation predominates, Ibsen did not lose sight of the other side of the case, in his brooding over the artist as a problematic phenomenon. If the artist's creative frenzy excludes him from participating in the happiness of the ordinary mortal who basks in the warmth of his experience, does it not offer ample compensation for what is sacrificed? "I live at such high speed," Rubek-Ibsen can proudly say of himself. "We live so, we artists." In a few years he lives through an ordinary lifetime; and in the course of his allotted span he can experience the quintessence of many lives. The scope of his experience makes him the prince among men.

And finally, quite distinct from both self-accusation and self-defense, a dispassionately reflective strain of Ibsen's thinking finds expression in the portrayal of Irene's and Rubek's relationship. The difference in point of view between the artist—the man, and woman—his helper, has the character of a typical phenomenon. It is *his* nature to set his work, the essentially impersonal aim of his concentrated

effort, above everything else, and to focus upon it as the most desirable of all ends; it is *her* nature, even when serving him with the utmost zeal, to regard the end of his creative endeavor as but a means toward the attainment of a more intimate and personal end of her own seeking. He finds his highest satisfaction in creative work; she yearns above all else for love and motherhood. And when the love of a man makes her devote herself to his cause, she feels her contribution not as a realization but as, at best, a sublimation of her inmost desires. To Irene the statue represented a child and suggested the promise of real children; similarly did Thea Elvsted speak of Lövborg's book as their common child. In both cases the situation reflects a fundamental contrast of point of view between man and woman, a basic antinomy in their sense of values, rooted in the difference of their physical constitution and the function assigned them by nature. It is wholly in keeping with this trend of Ibsen's thought, when, in addressing the Norwegian Feministic League on May 26, 1898, he says: "It is the women who will solve the problem of mankind. As mothers they will do so. And only as mothers can they do so."

We have come to the end of our study of Ibsen's dramatic work. At this point the reader is perhaps expecting a final evaluation of Ibsen, the man and the artist, and a summary statement of his significance in the intellectual life of our age. Such a conclusion would certainly be called for in a book of biographical or historical scope. But I wonder whether it would be altogether in keeping with the spirit of such a study as this, which has been primarily concerned with the concrete analysis of Ibsen's dramas as individual works of art. Having pursued what might be called an isolating rather than a comparative method, I

hesitate to assign here to Ibsen, in the form of a brief and dogmatic pronouncement, a definite rank among the creative spirits of the 19th century. That is rather an issue for each reader to settle with himself, on the basis of his own personal sense of values. To have any vital meaning, an artist's greatness, comparative or absolute, must be intuitively experienced. *Now the touchstone for measuring the degree of Ibsen's greatness is the intensity of the original imaginative response evoked in each individual reader by Ibsen's work.* And that is a test from which there is no appeal.

# INDEX

# INDEX


Agnes, 341
Allmers, Alfred, 300, 311 ff., 356, 360
—— Asta, 318 ff.
—— Eyolf, 314 ff.
—— Rita, 211, 316 ff.
Alving, Captain, 77 ff.
—— Mrs. Helen, 77 ff.
—— Oswald, 77 ff., 91 ff., 213, 341
Althea, 259
Archer, William, 96, 100, 315, 346, 347, 387
Arnholm, 216 ff., 237 ff.
Arnold, Matthew, 115
Aslaksen, 103 ff.

Ballested, 215 ff.
Bardach, Emilie, 242 ff., 299 ff.
Bernick, Consul, 10 ff., 133
—— Mrs., 5 ff.
—— Martha, 7 ff.
—— Olaf, 4 ff.
Billing, 113
Birkeland, Michael, 306
Björnson, Björnstjerne, 3, 13, 100, 102, 124, 306, 376, 399
Borchsenius, Otto, 97
Borgheim, 332
Borkman, John Gabriel, 161, 300, 356 ff., 398
—— Gunhild, 356 ff., 368 ff.
—— Erhard, 357 ff., 374
Brack, Judge, 244 ff., 265 ff., 311
"Brand," 3, 4, 9, 13, 116, 121, 125, 128, 159, 160, 299, 304, 307, 317, 322, 341
Brandes, Georg, 96, 100, 102, 121, 122, 123, 124, 135, 159, 210, 235, 242, 303, 306, 376
Brendel, Ulrik, 170 ff., 200 ff., 264, 322
Brovik, Ragnar, 285

Caliban, 84
Caspari, Theodor, 135
"Catiline," 3
Christ, 274
Collin, Jonas, 302

Diana, Mademoiselle, 258, 266
Dietrichson, Lorentz, 123, 198, 402
"Doll's House, A," 7, 26 ff., 100, 146, 147, 159, 169, 211
Dorf, Dina, 7 ff.

Ekdal, Gina, 136 ff.
—— Hedwig, 134 ff.
—— Hjalmar, 136 ff., 201, 311, 312, 322, 349
—— Old, 137 ff.
Elvsted, Thea, 246 ff., 262 ff., 409
"Emperor and Galilean," 3, 205, 213, 376
"Enemy of the People, An," 101 ff., 159, 166, 211

Falk, 240
Foldal, Frida, 357 ff., 374
—— Old, 357 ff., 373

Gabler, Hedda, 134, 243 ff., 294, 298
Galileo, 129
"Ghosts," 7, 9, 76 ff., 101, 102, 146, 147, 159, 169, 212, 245
Gjertsen, Frederick, 121
Gosse, Edmund, 324
Grieg, John, 306
Groddeck, Karl, 48, 176
Gynt, Jon, 360
—— Peer, 201, 335, 360

Haakon, King, 274, 306
Hauptmann, Gerhart, 246, 301-2
"Hedda Gabler," 133, 235, 242 ff., 273
Hegel, Frederick, 96, 101, 120, 135, 209
Heiberg, Gunnar, 387
Helmer, Nora, 26 ff., 72 ff.
—— Torvald, 26 ff., 71 ff., 311, 329
Helseth, Madam, 170 ff.
Herdal, Doctor, 277
Hessel, Lona, 4 ff.
Hjördis, 183, 205, 206, 207
Hoffory, Julius, 100
Horster, Captain, 106
Hovstad, 105 ff.

Ibsen, Fru Susanna, 303 ff.
Ibsen, Henrik:
absolute idealism, 125 ff.
art in relation to life, 405 ff.
Christianity vs. paganism, 3, 14, 205 ff., 236 ff.
clash of generations, 301-2, 351-2, 375
Ibsen, Henrik (*Cont.*)
conscience, 159, 272-3, 301, 350, 405
deviltries, tomfoolery, in his plays, 135, 160, 276
domestic life, 240-1, 303-4
double-faced portraits, 311 ff., 355, 400
failure, sense of, 302, 403 ff.
friendship, 376
illusions, value of, 127 ff., 165, 374 ff.
indignation, 74, 132, 235
love for Emilie Bardach, 242 ff., 299 ff.
mission, consciousness of a, 159, 301, 307, 375
moralist vs. artist, 74-5, 132, 146
Norway-complex, 9 ff., 99 ff., 209-10, 304 ff., 398 ff.
phases of his art, 301, 400 ff.
philosophical anarchism, 122
poet, first of all a, 75
psychology, a pathfinder in, 81 ff., 132-3, 168-9, 178, 198, 213 ff., 267 ff., 276 ff., 354-5.
radicalism, 7, 8, 98, 122, 302
sea, longing for the, 209-10
self-discipline, 146
self-projections of Ibsen, characters that are, 120, 158 ff., 300, 317, 351 ff., 375, 398 ff.
skepticism, 75, 354
traps for the reader, 164, 311
unhappiness, sense of, 302 ff., 399 ff.
unity of his life work, 402
woman question, 70, 74, 99, 409
Irene, 382 ff., 392 ff.

"John Gabriel Borkman," 356 ff.
Josephson, Ludvig, 399
Julian, Emperor, 159, 206, 207, 225, 274, 317, 376

Kaia, 286 ff.
Kiil, Morten, 104 ff.
Krogstad, 35 ff., 389
Kroll, Rector, 170 ff., 196 ff., 265, 311

"Lady from the Sea, The," 209 ff., 300, 358
Lange, Julius, 159
"League of Youth, The," 3, 4, 9, 199, 349
Lie, Jonas, 102
Linde, Christina, 55 ff., 389
"Little Eyolf," 133, 211, 310 ff., 356, 375
Lövborg, Eilert, 244 ff., 264 ff. 294
"Love's Comedy," 125, 240
Lyngstrand, 216 ff., 239 ff.

Manders, Pastor, 76 ff., 94 ff., 311
"Master-Builder, The," 100, 241, 242, 273 ff., 342, 375, 378
Maximos, 225
Meiningen, Duke of, 212
Meleager, 259
Mortensgaard, Peder, 170 ff., 199 ff.

Nietzsche, Friedrich, 237
Noah, 122

Œdipus, 189

"Peer Gynt," 3, 4, 9, 101, 125
"Pillars of Society," 3 ff., 70, 159, 210, 356
"Pretenders, The," 159
Prozor, Moritz, 378

Rank, Doctor, 46 ff.
Rat-Wife, the, 326 ff.
Relling, Doctor, 139 ff.
Rentheim, Ella, 356 ff., 372 ff.
Rörlund, 4 ff., 95
Rosmer, Beata, 170 ff., 213
—— Johannes, 170 ff., 193 ff., 237, 398
"Rosmersholm," 147, 167 ff., 212, 213, 240, 245, 264, 265, 342
Rubek, Arnold, 300, 310 ff., 317, 380 ff.
—— Fru Maia, 379 ff., 389 ff.

Saint Francis of Assisi, 205
Schandorph, Sophus, 98
Sigurd, 205
Skule, Jarl, 274, 306, 317
Solness, Aline, 277 ff.
—— Halvard, 273, 274 ff., 317, 342, 375, 398, 400
Sörby, Mrs., 142 ff.
Stensgaard, 199, 349
Stockmann, Burgomaster, 104 ff.
—— Doctor, 102 ff.
—— Mrs., 108
—— Petra, 105
Stranger, the, 217 ff.
Strindberg, August, 160, 280
Swanhild, 240

Tesman, Aunt Julie, 263 ff.
—— Jörgen, 244 ff., 267 ff., 311
—— Hedda, *see* Gabler
Thaulow, Harald, 102
Thoresen, Magdalen, 306

Tönnesen, Hilmar, 4
—— Johan, 8 ff., 21-2

Ulfheim, 379 ff.

"Vikings, The," 205

Wangel, Boletta, 215 ff., 238 ff.
——Doctor, 214 ff.
—— Ellida, 210 ff., 245, 333
—— Hilda, 215 ff., 239, 275 ff., 288 ff.
Werle, Gregers, 136 ff., 311
—— Old, 139 ff.
West, Rebecca, 170 ff., 176 ff., 236, 342, 398
"When We Dead Awaken," 100, 241, 378 ff.
"Wild Duck, The," 131, 134 ff., 169, 211, 374
Wilton, Mrs. Fanny, 357 ff., 374
Woerner, Roman, 312 ff.

Zola, Emile, 208

*DUTTON EVERYMAN PAPERBACKS*

| | |
|---|---|
| SHAKESPEARE OF LONDON, Marchette Chute | D-1 |
| THE PROPER BOSTONIANS, Cleveland Amory | D-2 |
| THE FLOWERING OF NEW ENGLAND, Van Wyck Brooks | D-3 |
| THE REPUBLIC OF PLATO | D-4 |
| THE STORY OF SAN MICHELE, Axel Munthe | D-5 |
| NAKED MASKS: Five Plays by Luigi Pirandello | D-6 |
| OF THE NATURE OF THINGS, Lucretius | D-7 |
| LETTERS FROM AN AMERICAN FARMER, J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur | D-8 |
| THE ENGLISH NOVEL, Walter Allen | D-9 |
| THE CRISIS OF OUR AGE, P. A. Sorokin | D-10 |
| THE MYSTERIOUS UNIVERSE, Sir James Jeans | D-11 |
| SMALLER CLASSICAL DICTIONARY, Sir William Smith | D-12 |
| THE LION-TAMER and Other Stories, Bryan MacMahon | D-13 |
| HISTORY OF THE KINGS OF BRITAIN, Geoffrey of Monmouth | D-14 |
| A SHORT HISTORY OF RUSSIA, R. D. Charques | D-15 |
| SCIENCE IS A SACRED COW, Anthony Standen | D-16 |
| THE BACKGROUND OF MODERN POETRY, J. Isaacs | D-17 |
| PASCAL'S PENSEES | D-18 |
| AUCASSIN AND NICOLETTE and Other Mediaeval Romances and Legends | D-19 |
| CAESAR'S WAR COMMENTARIES | D-20 |
| THE SYMBOLIST MOVEMENT IN LITERATURE, Arthur Symons | D-21 |
| TYPEE and BILLY BUDD, Herman Melville | D-22 |
| GEOFFREY CHAUCER OF ENGLAND, Marchette Chute | D-23 |
| YEATS: The Man and the Masks, Richard Ellmann | D-24 |
| 1066 AND ALL THAT, Sellar & Yeatman | D-25 |
| CONVERSATIONS WITH CASALS, J. Ma. Corredor | D-26 |
| INDIAN SUMMER, W. D. Howells | D-27 |
| THE SCOPE AND NATURE OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION, John Henry Cardinal Newman | D-28 |
| THE SECRET PATH, Paul Brunton | D-29 |
| MEMOIRS OF THE CRUSADES, Villehardouin & De Joinville | D-30 |
| THE STORY OF OUR CIVILIZATION, Philip Lee Ralph | D-31 |
| MAN WITH A BULL-TONGUE PLOW, Jesse Stuart | D-32 |
| HISTORY OF THE JEWS, Paul Goodman | D-33 |
| THE SPRING OF CIVILIZATION, C. A. Robinson, Jr. | D-34 |
| THE MANILA GALLEON, William Lytle Schurz | D-35 |
| EVERYMAN AND MEDIEVAL MIRACLE PLAYS | D-36 |
| HOW TO GET INTO COLLEGE, Frank H. Bowles | D-37 |
| HYPNOTISM, G. H. Estabrooks | D-38 |
| WE, Eugene Zamiatin | D-39 |
| SHAKUNTALA and Other Writings, Kalidasa | D-40 |
| A HANDBOOK OF GREEK MYTHOLOGY, H. J. Rose | D-41 |
| THE UNOBSTRUCTED UNIVERSE, Stewart Edward White | D-42 |
| THE ART OF T. S. ELIOT, Helen Gardner | D-43 |
| BITTER LEMONS, Lawrence Durrell | D-44 |
| SEVEN YEARS IN TIBET, Heinrich Harrer | D-45 |
| WRITERS ON WRITING, Walter Allen | D-46 |

## *DUTTON EVERYMAN PAPERBACKS*


EDUCATION AND FREEDOM, H. G. Rickover D-47
WORLD RELIGIONS, Benson Y. Landis D-48
PRACTICAL MYSTICISM, Evelyn Underhill D-49
NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND and THE GRAND INQUISITOR, Fyodor Dostoevsky D-50
THE RING OF THE NIBELUNGS, Richard Wagner D-51
APPROACH TO GREEK ART, Charles Seltman D-52
THE REASON WHY, Cecil Woodham-Smith D-53
THE MODERN IBSEN, Hermann Weigand D-54
SHAKESPEARE'S BAWDY, Eric Partridge D-55
OBLOMOV, Ivan Goncharov D-56

The patient lives on a Castle in
the air,
And the psychoterist collects
the rent in them

A Dutton Paperback

Everyman

# THE MODERN IBSEN

## HERMANN J. WEIGAND

*The Modern Ibsen* has long been recognized as one of the finest critical studies ever written of Henrik Ibsen's dramas, which form a cornerstone of the modern theatre. With extraordinary perception and with a thorough knowledge of stagecraft, Professor Weigand offers a creative interpretation of each of the twelve social dramas:

*Pillars of Society*
*A Doll's House*
*Ghosts*
*An Enemy of the People*
*The Wild Duck*
*Rosmersholm*
*The Lady from the Sea*
*Hedda Gabler*
*The Master-builder*
*Little Eyolf*
*John Gabriel Borkman*
*When We Dead Awaken*

These interpretations are based, in the words of the author, on "a close, sometimes microscopical view of the text . . . I experienced the thrill of discovering psychological relationships and subtle workings of subconscious impulses not at first suspected."

"This book is a stimulating, valuable and unusual contribution to genuine dramatic criticism."—Walter Pritchard Eaton

*Cover design by Milton Glaser*